

The History of the Future: Apocalyptic, Community Organizing, and the Theo-politics of Time in  
an Age of Global Capital

by

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Duke University

Date: October 9, 2013

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Luke Bretherton

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Theology in the Divinity School  
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ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation attempts to do two things. First, I provide a theological interpretation of congregation-based community organizing by connecting this activity to the politics of the church. The link between the two, I argue, is the rule of Christ, a non-hierarchical process of political judgment that operates in a mode of receptive generosity and vulnerability as well as accountability to deliberate and discern how best to resolve conflicts. Situating this activity within an apocalyptic orientation determined by lordship of Jesus Christ, I suggest that this process, when accompanied by the other structuring practices of the church, allows the social, historical community to embody the new age of God's reign. Congregation-based community organizing, I conclude, is the extension and extrapolation of this constitutive process, and therefore, can be understood as an act of mission in witness and service to the world. In addition, this missionary activity can also help to retool the church in the practice of binding and loosing, which has fallen into desuetude. Second, I describe how this missionary activity functions both faithfully and effectively to challenge and counteract the forces of late, global capital. By challenging the configuration and experience of time under capital, the work of organizing can serve to recover political judgment from a regnant market ideology so as to reconstitute the way decisions are made and conflicts resolved by opening them to a process more lited to the justice of God's reign. Moreover, in doing so, the political work of organizing can serve to offer a new future through forgiveness and reconciliation to individuals and a society trapped within a capitalist history whose end is immanently experienced in the destructive pursuit of unlimited growth and expansion.



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## **Introduction:**

### **Hope in Conflict**

*To be human is to be in conflict, to offend and to be offended. To be human in light of the gospel is to face conflict in redemptive dialogue. When we do that, it is God who does it. When we do that, we demonstrate that to process conflict is not merely a palliative strategy for tolerable survival or psychic hygiene, but a mode of truth-finding and community-building. That is true in the gospel; it is also true mutatis mutandis, in the world.*

--John Howard Yoder

*Without a revelation, the people perish.*

--Proverbs 29:18

On a Saturday morning in the fall of 2009, a group of congregants shuffled into the annex of St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Charlotte, NC. Tension filled the room as they came in and took their chairs around a table. A conflict had been stirring and was about to ensue. That was the purpose of the meeting. Recently, a "Theological Reflection on the Economy" had been issued by the state-wide community organizing network, North Carolina United Power (NC United Power), with which their church was affiliated.<sup>1</sup> Offering a strong critique of the finance industry, especially in the wake of the previous year's economic crisis, the paper sparked the ire of this group of knowledgeable officials, corporate executives, business leaders, lawyers, and representatives because it referred to the lending practices of the banks as predatory and usurious. Reverend

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<sup>1</sup> North Carolina United Power/ North Carolina Industrial Areas Foundation, "Theological Reflection on the Economy: A Working Paper for North Carolina United Power/ North Carolina Industrial Areas Foundation from an Interchange Among Theological Educators," (Charlotte, NC: N.C. United Power, July 2009).

Murdoch Smith the Rector of St Martin's called the meeting because, as their priest, he was concerned with their frustration but also with the banks' practices. Convinced that the theologians who wrote the paper had overstepped their bounds, the group wanted to confront Gerald Taylor, the lead organizer for NC United Power and the Southeast division of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), to challenge the intrusion into business and bank processes. The paper was a central piece of the recently initiated "10% Is Enough" campaign, begun by NC United Power in collaboration with other IAF organizations around the country and Europe as a way of contesting the disturbing effects of the economic crisis and the financial industry's response on its members and their families. It had been circulated to NC United Power's member congregations with the idea of offering a biblical and theological alternative to the lopsided arrangements between lenders and borrowers and banks and customers. The hope was to generate theological discussion around lending practices. But now the paper's call to reform the distorted path taken by the government and the finance industry was itself being challenged by these congregants who were leaders in the field. A conflict between borrowers and lenders about how to move forward through the crisis had arisen in the churches affiliated with NC United Power and that was the focus of this meeting.

As a prominent congregation in a city that had grown to be the second largest financial center in the country, St Martin's was particularly poised to host such a confrontation and engagement as the place of worship for many distinguished businesspersons, regulators, bankers, and legislators. Those gathered to confront Taylor included Elizabeth Reinhard—a bank regulator with the US Treasury Department's

Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, Martha Alexander—a retired member of the NC General Assembly, John Munce—a well-respected business leader, Nancy Carter—a City Councilwoman, and Jim Hughes—a retired corporate loan officer and executive of First Union National Bank (what is now Wells Fargo/ Wachovia). To help him face them, Taylor recruited his wife Phyllis Craig-Taylor—a law professor with expertise in property, to join him. Fr. Smith orchestrated and mediated the conversations, bringing them together to see, as he put it, “What could be done.”

The meeting, as Gerald Taylor recounted, began quite contentiously. Questioning his credibility and the inept “meddling” of the theologians and ministers in an area they did not understand, the group launched into Taylor, berating him, “How dare you raise these questions... Stay out of this, it’s not any of your business.” Not one to flee a confrontation, however, Taylor asked them to point out what about the paper was wrong and if they thought the banks’ actions were completely defensible. “Nothing in this paper is theologically unsound; there’s nothing here economically that cannot be verified,” he said. “You may not like what the paper says, but clearly there’s nothing in the paper that is not documented.” Refusing to shy away from the conflict, Taylor relayed the issues his organization was seeing with lenders as well as the crushing debt, unemployment, sagging wages, and falling home prices people on the ground were experiencing. As the two sides continued to converse, the mood began to change and new sense of, as Fr. Smith described it, “hardnosed pragmatic” thinking on how to address the problems of the system emerged. As the conversations continued, and as one meeting led to a series of meetings, they discussed the maleficence pervasive in the industry and, “working out of

their faith,” as Fr. Smith recalled, together they began to look for a way to use the system to find a better solution.

At this point a search for a theologically pragmatic resolution began. Recognizing that things were not right and had become imbalanced and unjust, the group started to work together to fashion an alternative, one that addressed the economic needs of those struggling under the crisis but one that could also use the system and work within it. As they began to workshop ideas, the group eventually landed upon the notion of principal and interest rate reduction and started to consider how that might be implemented. Additionally, realizing that banks were violating the special protection offered to active-duty military personnel under the Servicemember’s Civil Relief Act (SCRA), they agreed that this would be a good place to begin talks with the banks and government officials. For civilian homeowners being affected by the housing crisis, they developed the notion of a shared-appreciation mortgage, an instrument that would ease the growing burden of debt and interest rate increases. Coincidentally, the shared-appreciation mortgage could also help stabilize the toxic mortgage-backed investments dogging the banks’ balance sheets. This solution, reached through the course of conflict and deliberation, became the backbone of NC United Power’s and IAF’s work on interest rates and foreclosures in the years following. As a solution developed by the members of this congregation in connection with the ministers and theologians involved in writing the paper, it offered a unique path of response to the crisis, one the congregation-based community organization of NC United Power would pursue not only with Bank of America and Wells Fargo/Wachovia, but also with elected officials.

An act of communal moral discernment, this series of conversations at St. Martin's played a central role in the effort of NC United Power's campaign against usury and to decelerate and thwart foreclosures. It was an act of binding and loosing, where church members engaged conflict through real dialogue. As a result, it led to new alternatives, new perspectives, attended to new data, and discovered ways to modify structures, procedures, and practices that had become distorted, imbalanced, and unjust. It was a turning point in NC United Power's effort on this front. It was also a turning point for some businesspeople in the church on issues of the economy, debt, and the practices of high finance. "In that conversation and confrontation... or in that series of conversations," Gerald Taylor reflected months later, "[those officials and executives] changed...something really changed for them." Faced with real issues and wrongs, they became dissatisfied with status quo of how things were functioning while recognizing the real challenges to making change. Through processing conflict, impasse and division had given way to new creative resolutions. A sacred church function, it was also a central practice of community organizing, requiring listening, openness, and courage. This confrontation and the conversations it generated gave rise to new ecclesial and civic friendships, not the least of which was a collaboration between Phyllis Craig-Taylor and Jim Hughes to draft a proposal for the shared-appreciation mortgage idea the group had agreed on. Friendships such as these would be key to creating a base of relational power capable of confronting government officials and bank executives. Having discovered the route to change among one another, of addressing wrongs and discerning agreeable

resolutions, they were more hopeful that the same could work by engaging leaders in the finance industry and the government.

I begin my study with this story because I think it provides a vivid illustration of the crucial process that sits at the center of both the church and congregation-based community organizing and exemplifies the core disposition they share. The distinguishing mark of the church, as I perceive it, and what makes it immediately relevant to the radically democratic activity of congregation-based community organizing is its way of engaging conflict with audacity and receptive vulnerability. I am not the first to see this connection. Commenting on the ecclesiology of the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder, Peter Dula and Alex Sider have suggested that a mainstay of the church's nonviolent presence in the world according to Yoder's view is its cultivation of this posture in dealing with the conflicts that were sure to arise within the social, historical community.<sup>2</sup> Because it is oriented first toward Jesus in this way and because in its dealings with one another it has learned to challenge, listen, dialogue, and engage in receptive generosity without imposing a hierarchical framework for how things should work out, Dula and Sider conclude that the church may be more closely associated with the practices of radical democracy than is often recognized by their teacher Stanley Hauerwas.<sup>3</sup> Hence, this study is an attempt to develop more thoroughly the connection between the church and radical democracy suggested by this reading of Yoder. In doing so, it is also an attempt to make more explicit the suggestion of the political theorist

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Dula and Alex Sider, "Radical Democracy, Radical Ecclesiology," *Crosscurrents* 55, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 496-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 494-98.

Romand Coles that Christianity “matters” for how radical democracy is understood and practiced.<sup>4</sup> Though there are several forms of radical democracy, the kind I engage in these pages is that of congregation-based community organizing linked to the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF).

From the beginning, IAF has worked to develop community power through grassroots organizing and then mobilize that power in creative and bold ways to engage politically around community issues and concerns. As an independent institution, it was founded by Saul Alinsky in 1940 to help raise money and support for organizing in other communities. Alinsky cut his teeth as an organizer on Chicago’s southwest side in the 1930s, where he worked with stockyard workers and impoverished immigrant communities to launch the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council.<sup>5</sup> During this time, Alinsky refined his model of community organizing, a model he laid out in two books he authored, *Rules for Radicals* and *Reveille for Radicals*.<sup>6</sup>

IAF organizing, however, was to take new shape under the leadership of Ernesto Cortes, Jr. in San Antonio during the mid-1970s. As Mark Warren recounts, Cortes altered some of the basic structure of organizing, turning to a form of “relational organizing” that sought to make deeper and more lasting connections as well as to train more indigenous leaders. As a result actions were no longer determined by professional

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<sup>4</sup> Romand Coles and Stanley Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Mark R. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 42-43.

<sup>6</sup> Saul D. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971); *Reveille for Radicals* (1946; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1989). Also, for a biography of Alinsky, see Sanford D. Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky—His Life and Legacy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

staff, but emerged from conversations throughout the community, conversations that brought the community together and cultivated solidarity and mutual identity.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, whereas Alinsky tended to avoid religious matters and to shy away from religious commitments, IAF under Cortes would seek to develop a stronger reliance upon religious convictions and institutions of faith, particularly churches.<sup>8</sup> To this extent, Cortes transformed Alinsky's model, by establishing a network that encouraged "an interpenetration of religion and politics."<sup>9</sup> Thus, "In the process, the modern IAF came to base its organizing work almost exclusively in religious congregations and to reach deeply into religious networks to build organizations based upon religious values as much as material interests."<sup>10</sup> At the heart of Cortes' innovations was the discovery that community revitalization could come through building strong political actors who were guided and propelled by their faith. Recognizing that many people were frustrated by the notion that they should discard their convictions when entering the public square, Cortes instead sought to build a more explicit role for the church through these organizations. "In the eyes of IAF participants," as Warren reports, "scripture, correctly understood,

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<sup>7</sup> Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 51. Warren recounts the development of the modern IAF, with its roots in Alinsky's work, through its transformation under the leadership and innovation of Ernesto Cortes, Jr., in chapter two of this study, "A Theology of Organizing: From Alinsky to the Modern IAF." One key contributor to the changes made by Cortes, as Warren notes, were the directives and proclamations of Vatican II, even as the diocese of San Antonio was already moving in this direction prior to the Church's pronouncement.

<sup>8</sup> I do not mean to imply here that all participant institutions in IAF organizing are Christian churches. In fact, IAF aims to be a multi-faith organization. However, while there are a significant number of Jews, Muslims, Neighborhood Associations, and other groups within the IAF fold, the large majority of the member institutions are Christian congregations, as was noted by Warren above.

<sup>9</sup> Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 59.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.



pointed to a public role for the church through IAF political organizing.”<sup>11</sup> After Cortes, IAF institutions across the nation would begin to move in a post-secular direction, basing their political activity in congregations and often relying on central tenets and practices of the church to form and direct its work.

Despite the fact that IAF organizing at the turn of the millennium already hosted 133 local or metropolitan area affiliates, involving some two million members and connecting some 3,500 congregations, and has continued to grow since, scholarly literature on it remains sparse.<sup>12</sup> Even more, theological engagements with congregation-based community organizing are nearly non-existent.<sup>13</sup> To this extent, this activity continues to operate somewhat below the radar for most political theorists, sociologists,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>12</sup> Richard L. Wood, *Faith in Action: Religion, Race, and Democratic Organizing in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 6. Of studies on this topic that do exist, some of the best examining faith-based organizing from a sociological perspective are Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling* and Wood, *Faith in Action*, both which I have mentioned. Other studies include: Stephen Hart, *Cultural Dilemmas of Progressive Politics: Styles of Engagement Among Grassroots Activists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), and Heidi J. Swarts, *Organizing Urban America: Secular and Faith-Based Progressive Movements, Social Movements, Protest, and Contention* 28 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). Also Harry Boyte has perhaps engaged with the practice of Alinsky-style community organizing the most, locating its roots in the American populist movement. His account appears in Harry C. Boyte, *Commonwealth: A Return to Citizen Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1989) and *Everyday Politics: Reconnecting Citizens and Public Life* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Approaching these institutions from the perspective of political theory, see Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), and chapter 7 on radical democracy of Romand Coles’ *Beyond Gated Politics: Reflections for the Possibility of Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> There are only two studies that approach this topic from a theological perspective that come to mind: Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), and the somewhat sloppy engagement of Romand Coles and Stanley Hauerwas in *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*. In fact, the account of organizing I provide is to a large degree worked out between Hauerwas’ commitment to the distinctiveness of the church and Bretherton’s attention to globalization and pluralism. For me, as I hope will be apparent, the decisive theological perspective for working between these is the apocalyptic. Additionally, for a pastoral perspective on congregation-based community organizing, see Dennis A. Jacobsen, *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001).

and theologians. It is as an attempt to begin to fill this void that I have written this dissertation, offering my own theological interpretation of this important activity.

To develop my theological account, as I have already indicated, I engage Yoder's ecclesiology, focusing primarily on the central and constitutive process of binding and loosing as the crucial link between the church and congregation-based community organizing, because both rely on a more constructive understanding and approach to conflict. For the church, while conflicts will inevitably arise, because it can address these conflicts in redemptive dialogue they do not have to be debilitating. In fact, on Yoder's view, because the church has a sacred process through which to wholesomely engage disputes, it can approach conflict as something that is "socially useful."<sup>14</sup> And because the church believes that the Holy Spirit works in, through, and under it, this communal process of binding and loosing provides it with a resource for discerning what it means to embody the gospel of Jesus Christ in unforeseen contexts and in new, or degenerated, situations.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, for Yoder, it is as it addresses conflict in forgiveness and discernment that the church is most centrally constituted.<sup>16</sup> Processing conflicts through binding and loosing, the church conducts its own mode of political judgment and builds relationships of mutual will. In doing so, it abides in the rule of Christ, trusting that through a sacramental process that includes confrontation, receptive generosity, and accountability the Spirit will work and will lead them forward in discernment toward a

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<sup>14</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Believing Community Before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>16</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (1994; repr., Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 337.

resolution. Building off of the process of listening, personalizing, addressing wrongs, creating accountability, and coming together to generate new solutions, I suggest, congregation-based community organizing extends and extrapolates from this sacred practice to engage the larger society. Through this vehicle, therefore, the church acts in missionary witness and service, engaging politically to seek justice by, creatively and non-coercively, re-sacralizing the process for how resolutions are reached.

Engaging conflict in reconciling dialogue, addressing wrongs and creating solidarity between people, and taking the time to listen and discern together how the Spirit is leading, churches can begin to form creative and powerful organizations for making social change by marking the path to justice in hope. Employing a new mode of political judgment through the patient and vulnerably receptive process of binding and loosing, the church can move toward cultivating its own political will by forging thick relationships of solidarity and drawing on deep convictions. These critical resources, I believe, can then offer an alternative mode of political action for making real social change in a pluralistic culture. As Yoder puts it, “These resources can free us, both in logic and practice, from the dilemma of needing to choose between a pure but ineffective faithfulness and a compromising but effective pragmatism.”<sup>17</sup> The church, thus, not only casts a prophetic vision of justice but, through the extension of this process, its disposition and orientation also provide it with a way of finding resolutions that aim toward justice in hope.

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<sup>17</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, ed. Theodore J. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 267.

As I began to conceptualize the connection between the ecclesial process of binding and loosing and congregation-based community organizing, however, I quickly realized that I could not sufficiently articulate this linkage without situating them within an apocalyptic consciousness. It was only with respect to what Yoder has called the “apocalyptic style” of the church that I believed I could define the mode of resistance, challenge, and transformation enacted in the work of congregation-based community organizing.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, it was only with respect to an apocalyptic orientation, I discovered, that I could really explain the temporal and historical register that provided the conditions for the unique disposition at the heart of this activity. As a means of making theological sense of the practice of organizing, therefore, I begin by sketching the apocalyptic orientation of the church, as a means of identifying its unique approach to politics and its peculiar position with respect to worldly structures and powers. Relying on the work of a specific cadre of New Testament scholars, the most influential of which is J. Louis Martyn, as well as the Christology of Karl Barth and John Howard Yoder, I take apocalyptic to be not some escapist or disengaged approach to the world born of fantasy and utopianism. But instead, I understand it as an orientation derived from God’s invasion of the world, his defeat of the powers, and a resulting disposition resonate to the experience of time and the movement of history under his reign. As an apocalyptic community, the church is constituted as new subjects, endowed with a new political subjectivity. Corresponding to this particular political subjectivity, I argue, is a peculiar mode of resistance and engagement correlated to a new time and history. From the

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<sup>18</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Ethics and Eschatology,” *Ex Auditu* 6 (1990): 125.

apocalyptic orientation of the church, I am able to describe what allows congregation-based community organizing to move in a way that is patient, hopeful, and creative as well as bold and persistent. Furthermore, I argue, this backdrop allows them to remain hopeful in the practice of small politics so as to avoid a Constantinian temptation to take control while still effecting real change.

My positive engagement with the apocalyptic and indeed my sense of it as a theological starting point, nonetheless, situates the argument I develop in this dissertation somewhat uniquely within a larger conversation around the politics of the church, locating me between several interlocutors in this field. Hence, the apocalyptic politics I develop herein does not fit neatly within any of the prevalent camps that populate the field of theology and politics. It is more flexible, nimble, and less nostalgic than are the communitarian stances of Alasdair MacIntyre or Radical Orthodoxy, though it is deeply indebted to the theology of Stanley Hauerwas. Yet, it is also more critical and resistant than Augustinian approaches, whether they be more of a Niebuhrian persuasion or, like Charles Mathewes and Luke Bretherton (whose nuanced perspective is closer to my own), take the eschatological standpoint of Augustine as a starting point.<sup>19</sup> And yet,

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<sup>19</sup> Proposing that Augustine's eschatology is a helpful framework for constructing a theology of public life, or Christian participation in liberal politics, Charles Mathewes outlines his critique of apocalyptic, distinguishing how his own view is not escapist but deeply connected to a theology of creation. For all its similarities with my own position, what I find lacking in Mathewes' account is the decisive connection between the invasion of the world by God in Christ, effecting a rupture or break in the order of the world under the rebellious powers, and the political significance of baptism for the believer. I find it quite odd and telling that Mathewes makes no mention of baptism in this volume. The implications for his understanding of repentance, forgiveness, and the formation of the church as a new humanity in Christ are, I think, a crucial point of difference. See Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 313-5. I have already indicated my proximity, and yet distinctiveness, from both Hauerwas and Bretherton, but these will be more obvious as my argument unfolds.

because it is confessional and, therefore, more in touch with tradition and metaphysics albeit without conceiving these in a closed way, it is more hopeful than the democratic liberalism of Jeffrey Stout.<sup>20</sup> Finally, because it is not bound solely to immanence, it is also less dependent upon the dominant cultural configurations than are most emergent Marxist approaches, which attempt to sketch political alternatives as dialectically arising from the dynamism of late modern capital. Remaining apocalyptic, I perceive that the church bears a certain independence based on its origin in Christ, allowing it to be missionary as it engages politically. But because its own internal culture is one of courage, openness, and vulnerability, the sacred process it relies on to form this disposition, to build community, and to make decisions can also be a resource for democratic practice in society.

Beyond situating the work of congregation-based community organizing with respect to the apocalyptic, I also had the sense in writing this dissertation that I could not properly describe what was going on in this work without locating it in relation to the power of global capital. To this extent, in a spirit similar to liberation theology following Vatican II, my study offers what Gustavo Gutierrez refers to as a “theology of the *signs of the times*” by critically analyzing the dominion of global capital, especially under the

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<sup>20</sup> Of course, Stout’s entire corpus bears the marks of his pessimism but it is all the more pronounced in the final pages of *Blessed Are the Organized*. In conclusion to this study, he states, “I do want to claim... that the imbalance of power between ruling elites and ordinary citizens is the principal cause of democracy’s current ills and that is can be set straight only if broad-based organizing is scaled up significantly, only if it extends its reach much more widely throughout American society than it has to date.” He continues, “The imbalance of power between ordinary citizens and the new ruling class has, in my view, reached crisis proportions. The crisis will not be resolved happily *unless* many more institutions and communities commit themselves to getting democratically organized and *unless* effective publics of accountability are constructed at many levels of social complexity. Of this I have no doubt. Whether these conditions will be fulfilled is very doubtful indeed, in roughly the way that all collaborative undertakings of great social import are doubtful” (286-7).

influence of neoliberal ideology, and reflecting theologically on an activity of the church that resists and challenges this dominion.<sup>21</sup> Only within the context of the way global capitalism, and particularly the finance industry, have captured political judgment and political will so as to effect a transformation of the state and the subject did I think I could sufficiently describe the revolutionary work of congregation-based community organizing represented in NC United Power's campaign on usury and foreclosure. For instance, the series of meetings at St. Martin's were part of a larger campaign initiated in response to the economic crash of 2007-08. As I hope to make clear, through the process of listening, creating solidarity by forging friendships, discerning creative alternatives and proposals, and engaging in conflict with executives and officials, NC United Power sought to challenge and transform the actions and processes the banks were employing to respond to the crisis and to procure profits. In the face of such overwhelming powers and what seemed to be inescapable currents sweeping people into debt and foreclosure, NC United Power's patient but persistent effort sought to alter and reconfigure these procedures. Acting this way, it was able to provide hope and to make some change.

Like the field songs of slaves or the evening prayers taught to the children of an occupied people, hope often thrives in the ordinary activities that are so easily and frequently lost to history. And it is because they do not enjoy such historical credentialing that these activities also present opportunities for changing the course of history. It is this sense of the promise of the ordinary and the everyday that undergirds the work of

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<sup>21</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 7. Gutiérrez refers to the encyclical of Pope John XXIII and Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 44, as endorsing this mode of theological reflection.

congregation-based community organizations (CBCOs), just as it is the very routine and commonplace elements of the church's liturgy that fill its congregants with the love, hope, and courage to embody their faith. None of the practices or processes I describe in this study are extraordinary; none are solely reserved only for the uniquely charismatic or elite. Instead, the practices of community organizing because they are practices that thrive off of the church are ones that common people participate in and conduct. But in the very activity of these common actions, I have found that they also perform real actions of hope—though ones that may escape the historical observer—as they engage in transformation from the bottom up. Democratic renewal in this way can be understood to be a felicitous successor of the work and mission of the church.

With regard to genre, this study is a work of practical theology. However, whereas most studies like it tend to begin by posing a problem and then suggest a solution, I have written this dissertation in the reverse manner: starting with a constructive theological solution and then running it up against the economic issues highlighted and exacerbated by the housing crash of 2008. By doing so, I attempt to go out of my way to show that this analysis is indeed first and foremost theological and does not simply engage theology as an instrument for accomplishing some ulterior purpose. Along the way, I narrate how the work of NC United Power provides an example of the theologically faithful and effective practice of congregation-based organizing, as a way of resisting and working to transform the imbalanced and hegemonic processes of the market.



In part one of this dissertation, I set out a theology of the practice of congregation-based community organizing by connecting it to the politics of the church, and particularly the process of binding and loosing. Chapter one lays out the apocalyptic orientation of the church as a result of God's invasion of the world in Christ and the establishment of his reign. In doing so, I describe the distinctive cosmological, historical, and temporal outlook of the church which endows it with a unique political subjectivity. Chapter two, then, argues that the political subjectivity of the church takes form in a corresponding way of life, defined by the rhythm of a constellation of structuring practices synchronized by the rule of Christ. Central to these practices, therefore, is the social process of binding and loosing, as it allows the community to harmonize itself and continually to reestablish the rhythm of its life when conflicts or issues arise through honest confrontation, receptive generosity, a willingness to learn, and desire to forgive. Tracing the campaign of NC United Power against usury and foreclosure, chapter three describes how this ecclesial process of engaging conflict is extended and extrapolated in congregation-based community organizing. Understood in this way, I describe how NC United Power attempted to create a larger conversation in the church around the issues and wrongs that emerged during the economic crisis, relying on its own process of resolving issues to discover alternative resolutions that would lead society more toward justice.

In Part two of this dissertation, I situate the work of congregation-based community organizing within the context of late, global capital and describe more explicitly the unique mode of resistance and transformation it enacts. This second part is

by nature more cross-disciplinary as I make use of a Marxist toolkit to analyze the workings of global capital and to illuminate the structure and power of its hegemony. Chapter four describes the way political judgment and political will have been captured by global capital and finance, solidifying its dominion over the state and within the subjectivity of its constituents. In chapter five, I argue that the heart of capital's hegemony rests in its homogenization of time and that it is through this reconfiguration of time that it shapes its subjects. I also assert that to counteract the hegemony of capital and its processes, a new experience of time embodied in alternative processes of resolving conflicts, making decisions, and attending to issues is needed. I, then, attempt to describe how a new experience of time and an alternative process of resistance is first present in the church as it binds and looses and is extended within society through the work of congregation-based community organizing. Along the way I use NC United Power's campaign as an example. Finally in chapter six I further the argument made in chapter five by juxtaposing the theory of history presented by capital, which serves to reify and legitimate its sovereignty, with an apocalyptic history cultivated in the church and made available to the world through the activity of organizing. Correlated to this history is an apocalyptic politics of small accomplishments that offers a way of opening a new future from within a world trapped under capital's dominion. Once again, some specific stories from NC United Power's campaign offer real instances of this possibility.

Because my aim is primarily to make a theological argument, my examination of congregation-based organizing is not exhaustive. Instead, I attempt to highlight certain crucial elements of this activity as a way of illustrating the theoretical arguments I make.

I do not see myself as an ethnographer and I make no claim of being completely objective in this dissertation. Even more, I am not an investigative journalist, but a theologian seeking to reflect on these organizing activities for the benefit of the church. I have been and continue to be an active participant and leader in the local IAF and NC United Power affiliate, Durham CAN (Congregations, Associations, and Neighborhoods) where I am a member of the Strategy Team. I have, however, tried to be as true as possible to the events of this campaign as they unfolded. The stories and comments in quotations included in my account of NC United Power's campaign are from interviews and conversations I had with leaders, staff, and participants. Most of them were conducted between 2011 and 2013 while I was actively involved in the effort. Also, I do at times rely on reports of campaign actions and issues provided in the media to fill in some of the context of NC United Power's work or to depict similar stories to those being offered by homeowners and borrowers within the communities of the organization. I do so to clarify what was going on on the ground during the economic crisis and to corroborate the stories I have included. Readers will have to judge for themselves if what I recount and how I recount it is believable or not. Due to the nature of this study I do tend to present places where the campaign worked, however, I do not want to seem as if I think the activity of organizing is always perfect or pure. Indeed, it, like any church activity that seeks to engage the real lives of people, is and remains messy. Often, resolution cannot be reached. At other times, a settlement is reached or a win garnered that leaves one side resentful or angry with the outcome. Yet, I do not think this implies that the process did not leaven the outcome and temper the arrangements or that the Spirit was not present or

has ceased working. Indeed, more than anything what the process maintains, both within the church and as extended in community organizing, is that the work of justice continues and will continue but the *way* remains open. Boldly put, I might say that as the truth-finding and community-building work of the church persists, the work of radical democracy continues.

“Without a revelation, the people perish.” This brief passage from Proverbs communicates the basic orientation of the church and as a result a truly unique gift it has to offer the world. Led by the Spirit through the practice of the rule of Christ, the church can engage conflicts and make decisions in a way that resonates with the justice of God. Because it is apocalyptic, it can take the time to be more pragmatic. Modeling such vulnerable receptivity and extending it into the world, it can also thereby lead the world out of arrangements within which it has gotten stuck or to renew and reconfigure its processes when they have begun to degenerate or become imbalanced. In so doing, it can make change and actualize just transformations. At the same time, through further skilling it in the art of conflict resolution, of listening, of dialogue, and collective discernment, congregation-based community organizing can also rehabilitate and strengthen the church. As I hope to make clear, because congregation-based community organizing relies so heavily on a theological insight of the social usefulness of conflict, it can help churches recover the resources they possess for obtaining guidance and forgiveness and it can offer a vehicle through which the church can impact the world with this wisdom and grace.

## Part I

# Apocalyptic and Community Organizing as Theo-political Practice

*He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

---Colossians 1:17

*The church precedes the world epistemologically. We know more fully from Jesus Christ and in the context of the confessed faith than we know in other ways. The meaning and validity of concepts like “nature” or of “science” are best seen not when looked at alone but in light of the confession of the lordship of Christ. The church precedes the world as well axiologically, in that the lordship of Christ is the center which must guide critical value choices, so that we may be called to subordinate or even to reject those values which contradict Jesus.*

--John Howard Yoder

Community organizing is at heart a work of hope. For many grassroots community organizations this hope derives from the liberal ideals of equality, fairness, and freedom. But for congregation-based community organizations, as I will show, the hope takes a different shape. This is not because they dismiss the importance of equality, freedom, or justice. Instead, it is because their understanding of justice and freedom, of dignity and respect emerges from their deepest and most profound theological convictions. Their faith, with its sense of the sacred nature of human relations, informs the way they want to see things change “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6: 10). With the church as their base, these organizations thus seek to shape the social order by re-sacralizing it, extending the sacred practices and processes of their own life of worship

and discipleship into ever-expanding engagements. However, their mode of doing so is not one of triumphalism, domination, or violent coercion. Instead, as I will show, they work to shape society through witness and service, recognizing and addressing wrongs, seeking accountability, and offering new creative solutions to conflict. At base, then, I want to argue, this work is a work of Christian mission.

The theological nature of their work, however, is not always recognized and even those involved do not always clearly articulate the theological framework that informs their work. It is just such a theological description that I will seek to provide in part one of this study. To make my argument, I begin in the first chapter by clarifying the theological starting point for churches engaged in community organizing. This starting point is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Convinced that God has invaded human history and the cosmos in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, defeating its powers and establishing his reign, the church knows it inhabits a new age. It is this apocalyptic orientation that establishes the church's peculiar political subjectivity, a political subjectivity determined by the temporal experience of the reign of Christ. Correlated to this apocalyptic orientation, in the second chapter I describe more thoroughly the concrete practices and processes of the church that manifest the tempo and rhythm of the reign of Christ. These practices and processes set the pattern of social relations within the believing community, providing the conditions of its knowledge and political judgment by correlating it to the event of Christ. Moreover, they also offer a trajectory and a posture to the work of its mission. Central to the political reality of the church, I argue, is the process of binding and loosing, a process of political judgment that allows the church

to know how faithfully to continue to embody the reign of Christ when faced with the disagreements, wounds, or new challenges that inevitably arise as a result of the limitations and vicissitudes of human existence. By extending and extrapolating from this process of political judgment in the work of community organizing, I conclude, the church can engage politically in a way that not only remains consistent with its own convictions but also extends these convictions in mission. Finally, in chapter three I describe how the work of congregation-based community organizing builds upon the sacred process of binding and loosing as a means of extending the church's mission to the world to make societal change through the practice of radical democracy. To illustrate my point, I relate how NC United Power's campaign against usury and foreclosure embodied the elements of binding and loosing and, in doing so, sought to extend the justice of the reign of Christ to challenge the financial interests and the injustices of the market.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Christ, Apocalyptic, and the Political Subjectivity of the New Age**

Congregation-based organizing seeks to reconfigure the order of society so as to bring it more in line with the justice of God. It does so, I will suggest, as an act of mission formed by the virtue of hope. Its hope, its mission, and its sense of what needs to change are theologically grounded in the event of Christ whose life, death, and resurrection give a particular shape and mode to the activity of community organizing. In order to make this clear, it will be helpful I think to begin by describing what exactly the church understands to have taken place in Christ. I will start, then, by looking at how the church's understanding of the world, sovereignty, history, and time are all reconfigured by this event. Such an orientation is apocalyptic in nature, and as I will argue, it is this apocalyptic orientation that is the basis of the political subjectivity at work in the believing community. And it is this apocalyptic political subjectivity that informs the engagement of these congregations in the work of community organizing. Understood in this manner, I assert, the theological integrity of this activity remains intact because it is not subservient to other, higher, political purposes. Resisting instrumentalization, congregation-based organizing remains a sacred activity, as an act of mission shaped by hope in God.

In this chapter, I want to describe what I mean by an apocalyptic orientation. The basis of this orientation is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the transformation of



things that this invasion of the world by God establishes. If, ultimately, I hope to show that community organizing acts in concert with God's own saving activity, then I must begin by showing the nature of the transformation that the event of Christ has accomplished for the believing community. Therefore, this chapter will examine the profound transformation of the cosmos and of sovereignty, history, temporality, and political subjectivity imparted by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and realized with the inauguration of the new age of his kingdom. Because in Christ God's sovereignty over the world has been restored and the powers of death and corruption have been defeated, and because Jesus Christ's history reveals the real history of God at work in the world, apocalyptically the church knows that history is not ended even when it may appear so on the surface. At the heart of the church's conception of history, I assert, and at the center of its culture is a new experience of time, a new age. In this new age, time is determined by the content of God's reign in Christ, engendering subjects oriented by its pace, tempo, and rhythm. Therefore, I will conclude, the believing community possesses an apocalyptic agency, one configured to the life of God and correlated to the history of his work made known in Christ. Founded in the qualitative transformation of time by Christ, an apocalyptic political subjectivity orients the church and gives rise to its activity, knowing it has more of a future with God.

### *Apocalyptic and Its Genre*

To begin, I need first to define the notion of apocalyptic and to address the broader themes of the writings associated with this category. The term apocalyptic refers

both to the act of revealing or disclosing of divine secrets and to the divine truths that are unveiled.<sup>1</sup> In popular usage, the term is usually related to the end of the world and the natural disasters and supernatural battles that accompany this cataclysm. Hence, apocalyptic is sometimes hard to distinguish from apocalypticism, or overly chiliastic futurologies that prophesy the evisceration of the world and the annihilation of humanity. Such notions are typically derived from the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation, the content of which is often refracted through a dispensational prism. Considered more carefully, however, these apocalyptic writings are not mere prognostications on the course of history and the end of the world. And against popular conception, they are not written to provide a spiritual escape from persecution. While persecution may be one factor of the conditions within which apocalyptic writings emerge, as is certainly the case in Daniel and in Revelation, for the Jewish and New Testament writings grouped in the genre apocalypses emerge within communities as a way of responding to a perceived crisis.<sup>2</sup> As a result, apocalypses tend to renarrate, or revise, the current understanding of the world through recourse to a unique unveiling of things from a divine perspective. Such renarration is a way of making sense of the crisis and meant to encourage the community to remain obedient during this time.

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<sup>1</sup> See the entries for ἀποκαλύπτω and ἀποκάλυψις in Walter Bauer's *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th ed., trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, from Walter Bauer's 5th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), and the subsection on ἀποκαλύπτω and ἀποκάλυψις in A. Oepke, "καλύπτω," in Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 563-92.

<sup>2</sup> John J. Collins, *Daniel: with an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature XX, ed. Rolf Knierim and Gene M. Tucker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 22.

Thus, while there remains much debate among scholars about the characteristic features of apocalyptic writings, the genre has been roughly described by John J. Collins as

...a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.<sup>3</sup>

The writers of these texts find traction in these divine revelations to critique the current state of things by appealing to a larger reality and, in doing so, seek to inspire perseverance in their readers and hearers in the face of the immediate crisis. Hence, apocalyptic writings, as Collins adds elsewhere, "...provide a comprehensive view of the cosmos through the order of the heavens or the predetermined course of history," and this divine perspective "is a basis for consolation and exhortation... in the face of distress and a support and authorization for whatever course of action is recommended."<sup>4</sup> Both with regard to the order of the cosmos as well as the trajectory of history, apocalyptic writings present an alternative and larger description of totality that contests the prevailing view of things, a prevailing view that has fostered a crisis for the writer and her community.

More specifically, as Anthea Portier-Young has recently argued, the "apocalyptic worldview and consciousness" that arose in the historical apocalypses of second century BCE Judaism did so as a means of resistance to the threat of empire. In response to the crisis induced by the imperial edict of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV

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<sup>3</sup> John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1-20.

<sup>4</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 22.

Epiphanes in 167 BCE, these apocalyptic writers and thinkers resisted the hegemonic “values and cosmology” of the empire not by detaching from reality or by shying away from public action, but by “[urging] public preaching [and] aiming to convert a wide audience to their message of faithfulness and hope.”<sup>5</sup> For these Jews, apocalyptic visions were not intended to communicate messages of collective hallucinations, pointing the people away from the world. Instead, “Apocalyptic faith maintained that what could be seen on the surface told only part of the story.” Moreover, from a perspective that glimpsed the true order of the world under the permanent rule of God, “They could name the violence and deception of imperial domination and hegemony, but also see in history a pattern for deliverance to come. They could see their own path and not stray from it, remaining faithful to God’s law. And they could behold a future for humankind, Jerusalem and Judea, earth and heaven, marked by justice, righteousness, and joy.”<sup>6</sup> These apocalyptic visions offered an aperture of divine providence through which to reinterpret the conditions and circumstances these people were facing. By providing such a snapshot or scintillation they also gave hope and encouragement to those maintaining their resistance.

The New Testament book of Revelation (its name indicating as much) fits squarely within this genre, reiterating many of the main themes. Its writer, John of Patmos, seeks to describe the cosmos and history from a divine perspective in order to contest the domination of, not a Seleucid king, but the Roman Empire and to exhort his

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<sup>5</sup> Anatheia E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), xxi-ii.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 389.

readers to live faithfully even as they suffer under its corrupt reign. And it is from this book that some of the most memorable images and themes of apocalyptic emerge, themes such as: Armageddon, tribulation, the whore of Babylon, the beast, the false prophet, millennium, New Jerusalem, and new creation. Yet, despite its many misinterpretations, the book “is not a cryptic summary of the history of the church or the world. It is not primarily a prediction of the timing of the end of the world.” Instead, as New Testament scholar Adela Yarboro Collins continues, the book of Revelation is “a work of religious poetry” meant both to challenge the idolatrous and corrupt culture of the Roman empire as well as to admonish its audience to remain faithful in this time of crisis.<sup>7</sup> Likely composed for a community under persecution, the book of Revelation strongly resembles earlier apocalyptic Jewish texts.

There is, however, one strong distinction with regard to the apocalyptic perspective of Revelation and for the apocalyptic consciousness of its writer and his community. Whereas Jewish apocalyptic works appealed to a divine perspective on the world and on history that was yet to come, for the author of Revelation and for other Christian writers in turn this divine reality had become actual in the person of Jesus, the Messiah. Commenting on the central theme of Revelation, therefore, John Howard Yoder states, “Jesus is not to be looked at merely as the last and greatest in the long line of rabbis teaching pious people how to behave; he is to be looked at as a mover of history and as the standard by which Christians must learn how they are to look at the moving of

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<sup>7</sup> Adela Yarboro Collins, “The Book of Revelation,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, Vol. I: The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. John J. Collins (New York: Continuum, 1998), 412.

history” even as he remains the slain lamb, who in his obedient historical existence refused to try to get a “handle” on history.<sup>8</sup> For both the seer of Revelation, as well as the writers of the New Testament more generally, apocalyptic thus provides an understanding of history and the cosmos renarrated through the life, obedient death, and resurrection of Christ.

As is the case with Revelation, the apocalyptic texts of the New Testament, therefore, present Jesus as the key to understanding the world and history. Thus, within the New Testament, apocalyptic is not simply an aperture through which to re-envision the current order and narrative of things. But instead, it designates a divine act within history that has already begun to reconfigure the cosmos and to recompose that history. Thus, John’s vision and “biblical apocalypses” in general, “are about how the crucified Jesus is a more adequate key to understanding what God is about in the real world of empires and armies and markets than is the ruler in Rome, with all his supporting military, commercial, and sacerdotal networks.”<sup>9</sup> From the perspective of the New Testament authors, then, apocalyptic offers a means of reunderstanding everything given the reality that God has entered the world and human history in Jesus Christ. In other words, for the church apocalyptic was not merely the perspective of a fringe group. On the contrary, apocalyptic characterized the perspective of the whole of the early church because it was the experience from which they understood the whole of reality. The very nature of Christianity was apocalyptic.

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<sup>8</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (1972; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 232-33.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

In the past thirty years and with renewed interest more recently, New Testament scholarship, and particularly the study of Paul, has stressed the apocalyptic character of the early church. Focus on Paul's "apocalyptic eschatology" by a group of New Testament scholars and theologians as well as secular political theorists following the work of Karl Barth, paints an image of the apostle and his message as more seditious to the Roman empire and its interpretation of history.<sup>10</sup> An apocalyptic figure, Paul's letters

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<sup>10</sup> My use of "apocalyptic eschatology" relies on Martinus de Boer, who seeks to go beyond the notions of apocalyptic articulated by both Ernst Käsemann and Rudolph Bultmann. Refusing to side with either of these scholars, in his essay "Paul and Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology," de Boer argues that Paul incorporates both strains, anthropological and cosmological, of apocalyptic into his apocalyptic orientation. He asserts that, because Paul lived in a time in which both strains of Jewish apocalyptic—one stressing the forensic and individual human implications of God's work and the other emphasizing the cosmological aspects and structural implications—were present, the apostle can at times make use of both. In the end, however, he recognizes that Paul subordinates and integrates the forensic and individual apocalyptic strain under and into the larger cosmological perspective, giving Käsemann's perspective a slight edge over that of Bultmann. He states, "Christ's death cannot be understood in exclusively forensic terms, since it marks God's triumphant invasion of the world 'under sin' ([Romans] 3:9) to liberate human beings (the ungodly) from deadly power," and to this extent, "Paul circumscribes the forensic apocalyptic eschatology... with a cosmological apocalyptic eschatology of his own." Martinus C. de Boer, "Paul and Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology," in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 24 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1989), 184-85.

The importance of Barth's *Romerbrief* for recovering the apocalyptic nature of Paul's theology cannot be overstated. Against the prevailing Liberal theologies of his time, which tended to render theology subservient to anthropology, Barth's commentary can be seen as a five hundred and forty page reminder of the radical transcendence of God and the unique subject matter of theology. Barth of course thinks of himself as following Kierkegaard in making this argument, emphasizing the "'infinite qualitative distinction' between time and eternity." Karl Barth, "Preface to the Second Edition," *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (1933; repr., London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1968), 10.

There has been a recent explosion of work on Paul as a result of the confluence of two different strands of thought: the theological electrical storm ignited by Barth's *Romerbrief* and the ongoing argument in political theory between Carl Schmitt and Walter Benjamin over the relation between sovereignty, violence, and the law. Later in the chapter I will engage more thoroughly with the reading of time in Paul suggested in Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: a Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005). To engage more with this discourse see also, Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, and Creston Davis, *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010); Jacob Taubes, and Aleida Assmann, *The Political Theology of Paul*, Cultural memory in the Present (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003); as well as Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings

therefore are quite politically charged as is his theology. Indeed, following in this line, Ernst Käsemann has stated, “apocalyptic thought is the mother of Christian theology.”<sup>11</sup> That is to say, for the early Christians, their way of being in the world and their perspective on reality had been profoundly reconfigured by what J. Louis Martyn refers to as “God’s liberating invasion of the cosmos.”<sup>12</sup> Reading Paul’s epistles within the apocalyptic context of first-century Judaism, these scholars have come to see that Paul’s entire theology is apocalyptic in nature because it seeks to reinterpret all things with respect to the liberating work of God made known in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In this perspective, however, Paul is not alone, for even the gospel writers and the entire theological center of the New Testament in its witness to the teaching of Jesus must be read apocalyptically.<sup>13</sup> I have already noted how for the seer of Revelation (and of the New Testament authors more generally) “a crucial modification of Jewish

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(Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2004), 236-252; and Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, Studies in contemporary German social thought (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985).

<sup>11</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today*, trans. W. J. Montague (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 137.

<sup>12</sup> J. Louis Martyn, “The Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians,” *Interpretation* 54, no. 3 (2000): 255. Martyn notices here that this is an inversion of the normal view of religion, wherein “one could ascend from the wrong to the right.” With the apocalyptic, “Things are the other way around. God has elected to invade the realm of the wrong—‘the present evil age’ ([Gal.] 1:4)—by sending God’s Son and the Spirit of the Son into it from outside it (4:4-6). And it is in this apocalyptic invasion that God has liberated us from the powers of the present evil age...”

<sup>13</sup> This is the point Yoder makes in the final chapter of his seminal work, *The Politics of Jesus*. It is a point echoed in the essays included in Marcus and Soards, *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 24 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1989).



apocalyptic eschatology” has taken place.<sup>14</sup> The coming of the Messiah, the incarnation has initiated a new order of things, an order that is already emerging but yet is also to arrive in fullness in the near future. For the early church, as Martinus de Boer puts it, “the Messiah provided the essential and inescapable clue to a ‘right’ understanding of this world and its events, of the human condition or plight, as well as of what was expected to happen in the near future.”<sup>15</sup> Revelation is not merely the unveiling of divine secrets, not simply the disclosure of future events, “but is *actual eschatological activity and movement*, an invasion of the world below from heaven above, which is also in a sense an invasion of the present by the future.”<sup>16</sup> Jesus, the Messiah, is not only the hermeneutical key for understanding how history and the world relate to God, he is the salvific act of God in the world, establishing what Paul names “new creation” and John refers to as “new heaven and a new earth” (2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 21:1). The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus the Messiah not only tell us how to understand what is going on but also, as the decisive act of God, instantiate a qualitative transformation the consummation of which is already certain.<sup>17</sup> Apocalyptically, the early Christian community understood

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<sup>14</sup> Boer, “Paul and Apocalyptic Eschatology,” 354.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 356, emphasis mine.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas F. Torrance reminds us that it is the entire event of the incarnation and resurrection (as well as the ascension) that “together form the basic framework in the interaction of God and mankind in space and time...” Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (1976, repr., Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1998), 20. Following in the trajectory of Barth, Torrance notes further that for the New Testament writers, “Jesus Christ was regarded as constituting in himself the great Passover from death to life, from man-in-death to man-in-life-of-God, from damnation to salvation, from destruction to new creation” (49). For Jesus is the instance and revelation of “the mighty act of God,” which “is a creative event within creation, an abruptly divine act within history, a decisive deed completely setting at naught all cyclic processes, putting an end to the futility to which they are shut up but opening and straightening them out in a movement toward consummation.” As such it is an act of “cosmic and unbelievable magnitude” (31). This same point is made by de Boer, speaking with reference to Paul’s understanding of the apocalyptic and how it has been altered because it is now centered on the Messiah. He states, “To speak of

the whole of the cosmos, of history, and of humanity with respect the knowledge of God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Orienting the entire culture of the early church was their experience of the apocalyptic invasion of the world by God in the person of Jesus Christ and the transformation this invasion engendered in time, history, and the cosmos.<sup>18</sup>

### *Christ and Apocalyptic Cosmology*

As I have just shown, an apocalyptic disposition was not the stance of marginal extremists or fanatical militants whose ideas were distant from the more central themes of the New Testament and the message of the early community. Indeed, an apocalyptic perspective pervaded the theology of Paul and the early church more generally. While the heavens, the stars, the moon, and the planets were a constant for philosophical contemplation and an impetus for speculation in the ancient world, this was not the case for or the focus of Christian theology. Apocalyptic in its origins, Christian theology does not begin in philosophical speculation on the cosmos nor from contemplation of the heavens. On the contrary, it begins from the incarnation, the definitive act of God that

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apocalyptic, therefore, is to concentrate not on the direct communication of heavenly mysteries to a human being but on God's own visible eschatological activity, which will constitute the actual revelation, what we may call the apocalypse of God." Martinus C. de Boer, "Paul, Theologian of God's Apocalypse," *Interpretation* (January 2002): 24.

<sup>18</sup> Nancy J. Duff, "The Significance of Pauline Apocalyptic for Theological Ethics," in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 24 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1989), 281. As Robin Scroggs shows, while starting from different points, Matthew and Paul both end up in the same place. "Both the Apostle and the Evangelist think within an apocalyptic framework... both focus on *Jesus Christ* as the central moment within the apocalyptic structure, from which perspective all else is to be interpreted." Robin Scroggs, "Eschatological Existence in Matthew and Paul: *Coincidentia Oppositorum*," in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament*, 127.

comes from beyond. It embarks from and continually returns to revelation. The point of departure for Christian thinking on the world and the criterion to which it returns, then, is the person of Jesus Christ, for in him God has entered into our world, taken human flesh, and in doing so acted to deliver humans from a corrupted cosmos plagued by degeneration and bent on death and destruction. At the center of apocalyptic is a Christology not comprised of general concepts or placeholders, but based upon the particular life of a historic person, Jesus of Nazareth. As God come in the flesh, his particular life is essential for understanding the shape and direction of the cosmos, because in him the cosmos is reconciled to the life of God. In him, the real *form* and *logos* of the cosmos are made known.

God's invasion, thus, has shaken the whole of things to its very core and begun to reorder them through his Son and in the fellowship of his Spirit, initiating God's kingdom. Communicating this, Paul was no philosopher in the normal sense, but instead a messenger, an apostle of the liberating good news.<sup>19</sup> Paul does not reason from his encounter with the world to some stable metaphysics and then proceed to develop an ethic for such a reality. Instead, he begins by recognizing the way in which Jesus Christ has changed the cosmos itself, having entered it from beyond stretching it and rearranging its order. This event, which refashions the form of the world and reconfigures its logic, brings with it, then, its own ethic. And because this message encountered him, captivating him with its truth, the message now carries the saint forward to proclaim the

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<sup>19</sup> J. Louis Martyn, "The Gospel Invades Philosophy," in *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision: Critical Engagements with Agamben, Badiou, Zizek, and Others*, ed. Douglas Karel Harink (Eugene, OR.: Cascade Books, 2010), 14.

good news of this “act of God that had just now occurred, that was still occurring, that would occur climactically in the near future.”<sup>20</sup> The message of which Paul is an emissary is that God had come into the fleshly world and that in doing so he liberated humanity from sin and death and established a new community in fellowship with him.

In Christ God’s grace is revealed and established, perfecting the cosmos, redirecting it, resetting it, and filling it with divine possibility. Having broken into the human world, God’s invasion in Christ reveals a cosmos that is being recast, one whose form is being renewed and whose logic is being reordered. Because “[Humanity] cannot bring forward a Jesus Christ in which this atonement with God can take place,”<sup>21</sup> as Barth notes, in Jesus Christ, “there takes place in the created world the unforeseen, that which could not be constructed or postulated from either side of the world or of God, the work of the love of God to a world distinct, nay divided from Him.”<sup>22</sup> The apocalyptic orientation of Christian theology, as Barth following Paul so rightly emphasizes, gains its bearings on reality from “an event.” More specifically it gains its bearings from the moment of “God with us” in the person and work of Jesus Christ, a new “datum” but one not in connection with all other datum.<sup>23</sup> In Jesus Christ, we discover the cosmos to be larger than we had taken it to be, greater than what human investigation and reflection on its own can access. “This means that all the concepts and ideas used in this report (God, man, world, eternity, time, even salvation, grace, transgression, atonement and any

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G.W. Bromiley, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (1936; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010). IV/1, 39.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., I/2, 136.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 172.

others) can derive their significance only from the bearer of this name [God with us] and from His history, and not the reverse.”<sup>24</sup> The substance of this event, its real content, is Jesus Christ. As the substance and content of the Christian message, the person and work of Jesus remain the key from and through which Christian knowledge of the world in relation to God is established. Jesus is no mere philosophical or theoretical concept the general space of which must be filled with a specific content to secure or solidify the current cosmological order. He is not general philosophical link that provides humanity with a complete grasp of things as we had known them. On the contrary, God’s revelation in Jesus reorients us because he cannot be assimilated to a general concept under the banner of human thought and philosophy or within the realm of nature. But as the specific, concrete instance of God’s engagement of humanity, he reveals a cosmos that has been transformed, expanded, and turned in an alternate direction.<sup>25</sup>

With revelation as the ground of theological reflection and the compass of Christian orientation in the world, the cosmos is known to be much larger because God is active in it. It also that it is known to be redirected toward him, even when this contradicts the way things appear on the surface. God’s revelation in Jesus Christ is the event through which we grasp the trajectory of things moving in the direction of restored relation to God. There is no higher ground and no greater standard to appeal to in order to

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., I/2, 7, 17. This same notion, as Travis Kroeker notes, is present in Paul. Recognizing the challenge that Paul poses to philosophy, he states, “The greatest crime against humanity committed by Pauline Christianity is the destruction of natural causality by spiritual causality, the replacement of truly philosophical knowledge (human, worldly wisdom) by religious superstition (hidden, ‘divine’ wisdom)—a decadence represented above all by the Pauline teaching on the spiritual resurrection of the body, thus turning away from the natural nobility of this world in favor of a weaker spiritual one.” Travis Kroeker, “Living ‘As If Not’: Messianic Becoming or the Practice of Nihilism?” in *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision*, 44.

<sup>25</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, 21.

evaluate human life and the world.<sup>26</sup> As the one whose life orients that of the believing community, Jesus is the basis and route of our existence, “the one Archimedean point given us beyond humanity” which determines, theologically and apocalyptically, our understanding of everything else.<sup>27</sup> Only through Christ, then, is the shape of the world, its content, and its proper direction discovered. Hence, Barth can say with all seriousness that “Therefore we know only in faith that the world *is*.”<sup>28</sup>

Even creation, as Barth makes clear in volume III of his *Church Dogmatics*, must be known in and through Jesus, for there is no natural law or metaphysics available to human intellect alone that could anticipate what is revealed in his life and neither could it adequately account for it. This is not to say that is unnecessary for Christian knowledge. But it is to note that creation can only be properly understood with respect to the conditions of knowledge that accompany God’s complete revelation in Jesus Christ (§40). Understood in light of the content of this event, the cosmos is known to be shaped by the covenant of grace fulfilled in him, the fullness of God’s will and purpose (§41-42). In relation to the transcendent God who nevertheless acts in it, the cosmos is known to be greater than a series of random occurrences or mechanistic laws. Its trajectory, instead, is directed by God’s purposes and it is known to be free in Christ from the death and destruction that are the end of chaos and degeneration. As the moment and essence of this covenantal relation, Jesus is not merely the “realization of one of the possibilities immanent in the created cosmos,” but he is instead the instance of a new cosmos because

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., I/1, 305.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., III/2, 132.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., III/1, 6.

he is the instance of the recreating and perfecting grace of God in the cosmos who restores it to the shape and movement of his will.<sup>29</sup>

As the “image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” and yet, the one through whom “all things in heaven and on earth were created,” Jesus is the one “in whom (or by whom) all things hold together” (Col. 1:15-16). Thus, the apocalyptic orientation offers over and against an understanding of the cosmos absent God’s invasion in Christ “an alternative world,” providing “a new construal of the cosmos under God.”<sup>30</sup> A Christological *form* shapes the new cosmos configured according to the *Logos* of Jesus Christ who makes known the new order of things in conformity to God. As Yoder notes, this cosmic reality is what John’s gospel attempts to communicate from the very beginning by describing the way in which Christ has reconfigured the entire order of being. He states,

...instead of tailoring Jesus to fit the slots prepared for him, John breaks the cosmology’s rules. At the bottom of the ladder, the Logos is said to have become flesh, to have lived among us as in a tent, symbol of mortality, and to have suffered rejection by us creatures. At the top of the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., IV/2, 37. Attempting to introduce the notion of the reconfiguration of the cosmos within a scientific register, Thomas Torrance, following Barth here, states, given that the incarnation and the resurrection, “As acts of God who is the creative Source of all order in space and time...are essentially ordering events within the natural order, restoring and creating order where it is damaged or lacking, and it is in terms of that *giving of order* that they constitute the relevant boundary conditions within the natural order where it is open to the transcendent and creative reality of God.” Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 23. My understanding of the apocalyptic nature of Paul’s thought as well as the way in which I read Barth leads me, even in this respect, to tilt Torrance’s argument eschatologically toward recreation by stressing, along with Martyn and others, that the intrusion of God into the world is the opening of time for its fulfillment. I think Torrance would be in complete agreement with this point. Thus, we can imagine that Torrance’s fundamental question is the same as the one Martyn sees in Paul. They both are asking, “What time is it?” J. Louis Martyn, “Apocalyptic Antinomies in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians,” *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 418.

<sup>30</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Armaments and Eschatology,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 1, no. 1 (1988): 53.

ladder, the Logos is claimed to be coeval with God, not merely the first of many emanations. But then there is no more ladder: the cosmology has been smashed, or melted down for recasting. Its language has been seized and used for a different message. No longer does the concept of Logos solve a problem of religion, reconciling the eternal with the temporal, it carries a proclamation of identification, incarnation, drawing all who believe into the power of becoming God's children.<sup>31</sup>

God's invasion of the world in Jesus has evinced "a split in the cosmos."<sup>32</sup> Revealed in the content of his person, Jesus makes known a world reconfigured and at odds with the old order and cosmos. The logic of death with its order and form are broken; the logic of God's gracious transformation prevails. A new cosmos takes shape within the old.

The divine invasion of the cosmos, then, is a revolutionary act, one that initiates an epic clash as the new form of the world unravels and eclipses the old. Having invaded the world in Jesus Christ, God's grace is acting to deliver humankind from the current age of evil (Gal. 1:4), sparking a "cosmic drama that God has begun and will bring to conclusion at the parousia."<sup>33</sup> A profound tension permeates the cosmos due to the fact that the world remains to a certain extent in rebellion to God even as its complete subjection to God has already been accomplished, a consummation that is already becoming tangible.<sup>34</sup> Focused on this definitive event, Paul's thought is shaped by a sense

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<sup>31</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (1984; repr., Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 51.

<sup>32</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 161.

<sup>33</sup> de Boer, "Paul, Theologian of God's Apocalypse," 33.

<sup>34</sup> Martyn, "Apocalyptic Antinomies," 411. The context, or the tension, named here by Martyn is also described by Barth's distinction between the "ontic" and the "noetic" principles of this event. The full accomplishment of God's salvation effected in Jesus Christ is at once both statically (or ontically) established as the reality of things and yet also dynamically (or noetically) the process by which we come to fully recognize and inhabit this reality. The tension between the static and the dynamic principles continue to challenge one another when our reflection seems to slip too easily into emphasizing one over the other. Hence, for Barth, we are never given the degree of certitude a full-blown ontological realism



of looking back to this apocalyptic rupture, but at the same time this retrospective epistemology continues to disclose the new reality of things made known and made present in God's action. Here is the essence of faith, knowing these things made visible in Christ and living into them even as they continue to unfold. As de Boer puts it, "Faith (pistis, pisteuō) is, for Paul, a form of sharing in God's eschatological revelation... the believer is taken up by the gospel into this eschatological activity in order to participate in it and become part of it."<sup>35</sup> Thus, in Paul's view, believers are situated within this cosmic drama as those who know the world in light of Jesus and yet inhabit this transformed cosmos in the midst of the old. Against the form and logic of the old, they are oriented by an apocalyptic perspective that knows Jesus as the true "grain of the universe."<sup>36</sup>

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might seem to provide, but we also are not left to the despair or agnosticism to which a complete division between revelation and reality might drive us. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 171.

<sup>35</sup> de Boer, "Paul, Theologian of God's Apocalypse," 26. As will become more obvious in the next chapter, but as de Boer notes further when commenting on the prophetic revelations given during the gatherings of the community in Corinth, Paul understands the church itself to be caught up in this eschatological activity, not simply individuals. As the gift given to the community by Christ, "the Holy Spirit... represents for Paul the *apocalyptic-eschatological* presence and activity of Jesus Christ and thus of God in the life of believers" (27). I will discuss the relation between the activity of the church and the apocalyptic-eschatological activity of God when I engage the practice of binding and loosing in chapter 2, but suffice it to say for now that Paul sees the two as indelibly bound together in the presence of the Spirit. However, as Douglas Campbell notes, this does not imply that the faithful are located solely on one side of this conflict. Hence, while they do know themselves as having been delivered by Christ from their bondage to evil and death under the old powers, and while they, with Christ, are currently at war with these evil powers, Campbell states, "to a degree the war extends through the middle of each Christian community and each Christian person in the form of an ongoing conflict between flesh and the Spirit." Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 190. Campbell's larger thesis argues against deeply entrenched atonement theories that understand Christ as a sacrifice to assuage God's wrath and judgment. Instead, he argues that, from a Pauline perspective, "Salvation is fundamentally liberative and takes place in the face of evil powers, from whom humanity is freed..." and this implies that "God is fundamentally benevolent and the atonement intended to deliver humanity from bondage to evil powers and to reconstitute it in the age to come" (192).

<sup>36</sup> Yoder, "Armaments and Eschatology," 58.

Referring to the clash between the new and the old cosmos as a drama, I have already intimated that this is a clash of powers or a contest of sovereignty. Freed by God in Christ, the new cosmos known to believers has been released from the structures and powers that dominate the old and is restored to the sovereignty of God. And yet, they remain at the same time within the old, caught up in the dramatic clash. As those living within the old and yet at odds with it, they are an apocalyptic people, marking the reign of God within a cosmos whose powers and structures do not yet acknowledge their defeat and reformation. Implicit in my discussion of apocalyptic cosmology, therefore, is the theme of sovereignty. And it is to an apocalyptic perspective of the sovereignty of God with respect to the structures and powers of the world and present in the believing community that I now want to turn.

#### *Apocalyptic and the Sovereignty of Christ*

If in Christ the true shape of the cosmos is made known, then the structure of this new form conflicts with the powers and principalities that set the conditions which, to a large extent, determine the shape of the old. Thus, correlated with an apocalyptic orientation is a profound sense of the relocation of sovereignty from the rulers and structures that defined the old form of life to the reign and providence of God. For the prevalent orders and powers can no longer maintain their uncontested claim to dominion. Instead, this dominion has not only been called into question but it has been utterly defeated in Christ, whose existence unlocks the reign of these old powers and whose reign establishes a new form of life in freedom.

From an apocalyptic perspective, the invasion of God into the world is an invasion into enemy territory. God intrudes upon the world enslaved to the powers of death and sin, whose dominion has maligned the structures of human life. The intrusion of the new cosmos upon the old creates a conflict, a war between two opposing powers. The contest of this cosmic clash, furthermore, ripples through every nook and cranny of the world, evoking a particular struggle on the level of human social and political life. Paul's terminology for these warring powers is the "Flesh," or the old cosmos, and the "Spirit," or the new cosmos which has intruded upon the old. Commenting on Paul's apocalyptic view of the cosmos, J. Louis Martyn understands him to perceive these entities not merely as opposites, or counterparts, but as "a pair of warriors, locked in combat with one another."<sup>37</sup> They are "*two active powers*, each of which flexes its muscles in such a manner as to produce certain effects" in and upon the world.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, a divide of the cosmos ensues, a divide that sets the power of God over and against the powers of sin, death, and destruction. What these two forces are warring over is cosmic dominion. On the one hand, there is the dominion of the flesh, which exercises its power over the world in violence and the threat of death, directing all things to the inevitable debt of finitude.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, there is the dominion of the Spirit,

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<sup>37</sup> Martyn, "Apocalyptic Antinomies," 416. Martyn notes here that Paul's use of ἀφορμή indicates the manner in which these two entities are engaged with one another. Furthermore, he states, "And this warfare has been started by the Spirit, sent by God into the realm of the Flesh."

<sup>38</sup> Martyn, "The Gospel Invades," 27. Italics original.

<sup>39</sup> Martyn's interpretation of this cosmic force of the Flesh and its dominion over the world prior to God's invasion stands in direct connection to how Barth conceives of it. Barth states, "Flesh is the concrete form of human nature marked by Adam's fall, the concrete form of the entire world which, when seen in the light of Christ's death on the cross, must be regarded as the old world already past and gone, the form of the destroyed nature and existence of men as they have to be reconciled with God." Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 151.

which exercises its power over the cosmos by recasting the world under the grace of God and the offer of sharing in the divine life. Under the Spirit the cosmos is directed toward God and the new heaven and the new earth. The contest between these two forces, however, is not one of (Manichean) equals, for the sovereignty of God in Christ has broken the dominion of the flesh. Under him, a new age is inaugurated, a new rule established over the cosmos determining its order and purpose. The complete reconfiguration of the cosmos is already guaranteed in Christ's victory and, for those who have apocalyptic knowledge of this victory, the powers and structures of the cosmos are reformed.<sup>40</sup> What is at stake and what occurs in this clash over sovereignty, however, I want to make clearer.

The power of the flesh, or as Yoder and Barth tend to refer to them, the powers or structures of the old world, refers to "the patterns or regularities that transcend or precede or condition the individual phenomena we can immediately perceive," exercising of their own a "kind of capacity to make things happen."<sup>41</sup> They are the forces intrinsic to creaturely existence that set the conditions for and shape the way we live. Institutions, laws, technology, infrastructure, traditions, ideas, conventions, rulers, etc. would all constitute such structures and powers. Though these powers and structures were created by God, they no longer serve as they should because they have been distorted and

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<sup>40</sup> Duff, "The Significance," 283.

<sup>41</sup> Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 138. Barth makes a similar claim in §78 of *The Christian Life* where, in his discussion of "The Struggle for Righteousness," he avers that these powers "thus acquire the character of entities with some kind of existence and dominion of their own..." Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics IV/4. Lecture Fragments*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 215. Available online through the Digital Karl Barth Library: <http://solomon.dkbl.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/cgi-bin/asp/philo/dkbl/getobject.pl?c.823:1.barth>

disfigured by the rebellion of humanity against God. Disfigured by this rebellion, they malign the world with a “disorder which both inwardly and outwardly controls and penetrates and poisons and disrupts all human relations and interconnections,” subjecting them to death and destruction.<sup>42</sup> The original goodness of their ordering function has become corrupted. Where such powers and structures once worked to mediate the love of God to us, “now we find them seeking to separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:38); we find them ruling over the lives of those who live far from the love of God (Eph. 2:2); we find them holding us in servitude to their rules (Col. 2:20); we find them holding us under their tutelage (Gal. 4:3).” Or, in other words, “These structures which were supposed to be our servants have become our masters and our guardians.”<sup>43</sup> Projecting themselves as the bearers of ultimate meaning and privileging their operations above all else, they have broken away from their original function of ordering the world toward God. Instead, they serve to enslave humanity and all of creation to sin and death. Functioning collectively in this respect, they comprise an empire in rebellion against God, trading on death to construct a demonic form of life.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>43</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 141.

<sup>44</sup> Barth, *The Christian Life*, 220. Furthermore, as Yoder recognizes, these structures, whether they be economic or political, need not demand the adoration or worship of their subjects in order for them to be in rebellion against God and to seek to have their way with our lives. For simply in presenting themselves as the ideal order and deploying various apparatuses to reify this order, they are already making religious, and therefore, divine claims by implicitly setting themselves up as their own ends. John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002), 37. The mid-twentieth century Jewish philosopher and political theorist Jacob Taubes asserts that Paul’s letter to the Romans is “a political declaration of war,” that is, “a political theology, a *political* declaration of war on the Caesar.” Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, 16. Reiterating this point for the whole of Christian literature of the time, Taubes remarks, “Christian literature is a literature of protest against the flourishing cult of the emperor.”

As an empire, that is, as a consolidation and organization of force, these powers and principalities proclaim themselves sovereign. Propping themselves up on their own rebellious claim to dominion, they exercise their sovereignty over human life by claiming for themselves the right to determine the purpose of life. Because the full extent of their power is exhibited in the ability to kill, their claim to sovereignty is established through their monopoly on violence. The source of their power, therefore, is in the ability to put to death those who do not conform to their will and order.<sup>45</sup> Jesus' life, however, challenges the sovereignty of these powers and structures, but, in doing so, he does not abolish them. The clash between the powers and God for sovereignty does not end with God's destruction of the powers, even as his victory is sure. Instead, Jesus defeats the

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<sup>45</sup> Daniel Colucciello Barber, "The Production of Immanence: Deleuze, Yoder, Adorno" (Ph.D. diss. Duke University, 2008), 8 [page numbers refer to the unpublished manuscript]. Barber avers here that in breaking the sovereignty of the powers, Jesus' death exploits their highest function. If to kill is the highest function of the powers, then Jesus' free acceptance of death at their hands absorbs the apparent absolute function of their power and subsequently shows it to be, in fact, merely relative. Thus, Barber goes on to assert that, "when Jesus freely accepts death, he undermines the Powers' overdetermination. The bare overdetermination-function of the Powers runs up against *a* life, a particular life, that is cannot fully determine" (82). Furthermore, critiquing theological interpretations that ignore the clash of sovereignty at stake, Barber continues, saying, "it seems that to frame the passion narrative simply as a conflict between totality and infinity is to fail to capture the temporal and political elements which are at stake" (82). That is, to fail to conceptualize the death and resurrection of Christ within its political-cosmological register in order to situate it first within an ontological one is to misconstrue the very material nature of the event itself, and quite possibly, the entire message of the gospel. For more discussion on the theme of sovereignty as an issue of political theology, see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 15-29; and *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1-31. In these studies Agamben attempts to develop and extend Foucault's sense of the "biopolitics" of modern sovereignty beginning in the *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003); and *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). In short, the transformation of the nature of sovereignty and the extension of its reach—both of which Foucault attempts to capture with the term "biopolitics"—can be grasped in his statement that: "The right of sovereignty was the right to take life or let live. And then this new right is established: the right to make live and to let die." *Society Must Be Defended*, 241. Foucault's analysis gives a genealogy of the shift toward biopower as a new exercise of sovereignty that is more individual and more microphysical.

powers in a way that deactivates them and exposes their pretension but does not annihilate them. Because they are essential components of human life, these structures cannot simply be “destroyed or set aside or ignored.” On the contrary, if we are to be saved “in our humanity,” then, instead, “their sovereignty must be broken.”<sup>46</sup> And this is in fact what Jesus does by living within and under them an independent and free human existence, willingly allowing them to put him to death and yet being raised to life beyond their power.

To describe the way in which Jesus, in his life, breaks the sovereignty of these powers, Yoder follows Hendrikus Berkhof’s explication of Colossians 2:13-15. In doing so, he sees Jesus life as a three-fold challenge that disarms, unmask, and triumphs over them. Given that the sovereignty of these powers is exhibited in their ability to kill, the absolute freedom and “independence” of Jesus from them and their rule is exhibited in the cross and resurrection.<sup>47</sup> In the cross, the full force of the earthly powers of the old cosmos are concentrated on Jesus, exercising the full extent of their strength and authority. But even as they believe themselves to have taken his life, his resurrection makes clear that he has given it freely (John 10:18) and that this path is the way the superior power of God works. Thus, his resurrection unveils the limits of the rule of these powers, an act of the power of God that goes beyond them. His death exhausts their power, disarming and deactivating them by the fact that in rising from the dead he displays that his entire life has been beyond the reach of their dominion. As the “Royal

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<sup>46</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 144.

<sup>47</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 145.

Man”, the new Adam, who as human conformed humanity to the “mode of existence and attitude of God,” Jesus lived within these orders but in such a way that his freedom within them exposed their limits.<sup>48</sup> As the exception to their rule, he unlocks their rule, introducing the possibility of a new form of life adhering to a higher purpose and meaning.<sup>49</sup> Hence, his death and resurrection defuse their sovereignty, opening up a new reign of freedom in his life-giving Spirit.

Jesus’ conflict with the powers also unmask them, revealing their rebellious and fundamentally distorted, and contingent, nature. In his independence from them, Jesus exposes the perverse nature of their dominion, revealing that while they claim to provide the necessary conditions to make life function, by attempting to destroy this perfect human life they are, in fact, opposed to human flourishing. Exposing their real function, the cross unveils the oppressive and destructive nature of their dominion. Unmasking their pretension and rebellion, Jesus reveals the way they enslave humanity and hold us

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<sup>48</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2, 171-2.

<sup>49</sup> Emphasis on the exception as a political category forms the basis of Carl Schmitt’s study of sovereignty in his classic, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Uncovering the theological roots of the modern concept of sovereignty, Schmitt points out that the essence of sovereignty correlates to divine fiat in the sense that the “Sovereign is he who decides on the exception” (5). Because it is this exception which establishes the rule, the exception remains an integral political concept for any state. Working from Kierkegaard’s stress on the importance of the exception in *Repetition*, Schmitt states, “Precisely a philosophy of concrete life must not withdraw from the exception and the extreme case, but must be interested in it to the highest degree. The exception can be more important to it than the rule, not because of a romantic irony for the paradox, but because the seriousness of an insight goes deeper than the clear generalizations inferred from what ordinarily repeats itself. The exception is more interesting than the rule. The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything: It confirms not only the rule but also its existence, which derives only from the exception. In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition” (15). In other words, because the exception is the suspension of the law, it is the hidden ground of the law even for liberal constitutions. For an insightful discussion of Jesus as the exception see Daniel Barber, “The Particularity of Jesus and the Time of the Kingdom: Philosophy and Theology in Yoder,” *Modern Theology* 23 No. 1 (January 2007): 63-89.



captive.<sup>50</sup> When known with respect to the truth of Jesus, and the cross and resurrection, the sovereignty of the powers is exposed as a perverted and “demonic blend of order and revolt” with “no intrinsic ontological dignity.”<sup>51</sup> In light of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, then, the sovereignty of the powers and the order of their sovereignty is revealed to be completely contingent, relative, and corrupted.<sup>52</sup> To this extent, Jesus disenchants the powers because he demystifies the illusion of their claim to legitimacy.

Finally, Jesus triumphs over the powers, subjecting them to his own sovereign reign. Having disarmed and unmasked them, he also overrules them in the unique actualization of his freedom. He makes known their created nature, and as a result, their subservience to the providence of God even in their rebellion. The full extent of their power displayed in the killing of Jesus is subjected to the higher purpose of God. They are subordinated to the will of God through his cross and resurrection. For Yoder, while the powers responded to Christ with hostility, Jesus triumphed as Lord over them, raised in victory to reign over a new creation.<sup>53</sup> A new order is established in him, the structures and powers, as the cosmos and human existence, are directed to the will of God made

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<sup>50</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2002), 37.

<sup>51</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (1994; repr., Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 56.

<sup>52</sup> Graham Ward has recently argued along these lines, stating, “It is as if, before the freedoms won by Christ through the cross and resurrection can be participated in and before the Spirit can empower this participation for the working out of salvation, human beings have to recognize the forms of slavery in which all are bound. And such a recognition can come about only if the powers ruling this world are made manifest in the unjust killing of the most just man. Making manifest the powers that operate in this world and their limitations allows judgment to be passed upon them, a judgment that history enacts.” Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 291.

<sup>53</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Discipleship as Political Responsibility*, trans. Timothy J. Gedder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 19. See also his, *Christian Witness*, 9.

known in him. In his triumph over them, they are subjected to his lordship. Under his rule, they are subordinated and redeployed in his service (even as they themselves are not completely aware of this) as agents of God's purposes.

As Lord and king, Jesus Christ reigns over the powers, God in him having wrested authority from them and subjected them to his rule. Acknowledgement of this reality is what lies at the heart of the earliest Christian confession of faith: Christ is Lord (*Christos kyrios*).<sup>54</sup> "Christ, reigning at the right hand of God,... carries out the purposes of the one who is sovereign. His function is ruling over the rebellious structures of the universe for God's purposes."<sup>55</sup> But his reign is also the "fulfillment of a new social hope," a social hope realized in the believing community which "is the place where Christ's lordship is operative."<sup>56</sup> Given that in his freedom and willingness to suffer death, Jesus reveals himself "not as part of the cosmos but as its Lord," then also, "The believer risen in Christ is no longer in their hold."<sup>57</sup> A new, distinct community emerges under this sovereignty, one defined by the same ethic as its king. Because the victory of Christ is already secure, the community can acknowledge in light of this "original revolution" that "people who bear crosses are [the ones] working with the grain of the universe."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 158.

<sup>55</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 247.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 246, 248.

<sup>57</sup> Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 52.

<sup>58</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 28; and Yoder, "Armaments and Eschatology," 58. Most readers will recognize this line from Yoder, as it was the basis for the title of Stanley Hauerwas' 2000-2001 Gifford Lectures, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001).

Under the sovereignty of Christ's lordship a new form of life is established and made possible for humanity. Because Jesus has disarmed, unmasked, and triumphed over the powers, according to Yoder, the followers of Jesus, the believing community, are enabled to live also in freedom from them. As he indicates, given Christ's decisive triumph over them, those gathered by faith in him discover that they themselves enjoy a "moral independence" as the social body formed from the independence of Jesus Christ. The freedom he lived and won is now their freedom, as those no longer under the order of sin and death but integrated into the "order of redemption".<sup>59</sup> The believing community, therefore, need not become entangled in the powers' games in the same way, deploying a mere counter-power comprised of the same fabric of violence. Instead, this unique community is free to live in the knowledge that the powers have been disenchanted, deactivated, and redirected. "The church does not attack the powers; this Christ has done. The church concentrates on not being seduced by them. By existing the church demonstrates that their rebellion has been vanquished."<sup>60</sup> Because the powers no longer reign where the sovereignty of God in Jesus is acknowledged, the believing community can function within the structures of creaturely existence as a power and structure in its own right.<sup>61</sup> In the freedom of the sovereignty of Christ, it is possible for the church to engage with the powers and structures of the old order in new and creative ways that may participate in refashioning and redirecting them.

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<sup>59</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 371.

<sup>60</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 150.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

As I have argued, within an apocalyptic orientation the sovereignty of God in Christ has been established over the powers and empire of the old cosmos. And his rule gives shape to a new form of life, directed to a new end and organized by an alternative political logic. In this respect, the believing community is free. Its freedom from the sovereignty of the powers, moreover, also implies that it is free in its future and in its history. Because dominion puts its roots into history, as a means of legitimating and reifying its reign, the sovereignty of God in Christ also reconfigures history. Following my discussion of sovereignty above, therefore, I want now to address the new conception of history that accompanies an apocalyptic orientation and correlates with the sovereign reign of God in Christ. I will assert that in connection with the order of life under the reign of God there is a corresponding doxological conception of history.<sup>62</sup>

### *Christ and Apocalyptic History*

Having established that for the believing community the sovereignty of God has been established in the work of Christ, I now want to examine the corresponding history that complements the advent of this reign. Because history is the way in which cultures make sense of their own existence,<sup>63</sup> it is also through these narratives that the dominant political order legitimates and reifies its rule. History gives a kind of justification to the order and its rulers that helps to rationalize it and ground its claim to sovereignty. The

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<sup>62</sup> J. Alexander Sider, *To See History Doxologically: History and Holiness in John Howard Yoder's Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2011).

<sup>63</sup> See Stanley Hauerwas, "A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on *Watership Down*," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 171-199.

sovereignty of God established in the work of Christ also, then, engenders a peculiar conception of history. Following Barth and Yoder, I will suggest that the reign of God in the lordship of Christ is accompanied by a hopeful and expectant conception of history and the future. While not ignoring the contingency of human existence, this conception of history nonetheless is infused with meaning and significance derived from the active presence of God within in it and who is its end. Its history, as Alex Sider has argued, is therefore doxological.<sup>64</sup> In other words, as I will aver, it is apocalyptically oriented with the hopeful expectation that God will show up and will bring all things to himself. Given that there can be “no history unless life can be seen in terms of ultimate goals,” as Yoder remarks, “the *eschaton*, the ‘Last Thing,’ the End-Event, imparts to life a meaningfulness that it would not otherwise have.”<sup>65</sup> Oriented by this end and its hopeful expectation, the believing community conceives of history as pregnant with meaning and, therefore, moving toward this purposeful end. Apocalyptically, then, a conception of history derived from Christ offers meaning to the community’s way of life and allows it to face the future with hope while not needing to try to control or manage its course, even in the face of circumstances that seem to be moving in the opposite direction.

I argued above that the life of Jesus is the rule for the order of things under the reign of God and free from the domination of the powers. As the rule, therefore, his life makes known the meaning of history and its future, and it also reveals the route that

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<sup>64</sup> Sider, *To See History Doxologically*, 27. As Sider argues, after Ernst Troeltsch, “Yoder shifted the terrain of the debate from typology to history in a way that has been underappreciated.”

<sup>65</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 145. Yoder goes on here to make a distinction between eschatology and apocalypics. Where the latter seeks to obtain precise information about the future the former finds a revealed teleology to give a certain earnestness and meaning to the present. What Yoder here terms simply eschatology, I have been calling apocalyptic eschatology throughout.

history leading to this future takes. To quote Yoder, “The particularity of the incarnation *is* the universality of the good,” because in the unique historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth “the truth has come to our side of the ditch.”<sup>66</sup> This implies, I have asserted, that Jesus is the theme and substance of an apocalyptic orientation because “*in* the concrete historical reality of the life and death and rising of Jesus, the otherwise invisible God has been made known normatively.” The church’s conception of history is, therefore, essentially “Jesulogical,” knowing in his specific concrete life the truth of history. Consequently, for the church the way it articulates history is profoundly reshaped and renarrated, and it is within its history that the reign of God is validated.<sup>67</sup> For the church, then, God’s invasion of history transforms it by virtue of the fact that he has united himself to it, acting in it to accomplish his purposes. Human history, the church perceives, is indelibly bound to his history because he is the one in whom our end is achieved and God’s will is fully realized. As Barth puts it,

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<sup>66</sup> Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 62.

<sup>67</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Historiography as a ministry to Renewal,” *Brethren Life and Thought* 42 (2004): 217. See also, Nathan R Kerr, *Christ, History and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 147. While I have found Kerr’s argument to be helpful for clarifying my own argument, at this point, to my mind, he seems to misread Yoder’s notion of the independence of Jesus. He states, “...for Yoder, apocalyptic is fundamentally a means to thinking history, politics, and the church on the basis of the ‘objective reality’ of Jesus’s singular historicity, or what he calls Jesus’ ‘independence.’ In its most basic sense, to speak of Jesus’ ‘independence’ is to say that Jesus lives, concretely and in history, a life-story that is entirely free from and irreducible to any pre-given ‘historical’ coordinates, any general or ‘meta’ principle that might serve to merge the complexities and contingencies of his history within any universalizable scope or logic. At the same time, Jesus’ independence demarcates also the way in which his apocalyptic historicity happens concomitantly as the *intensification and transformation* of the historically contingent as such” (131). While Kerr is right in his insistence on the independence, for Yoder, of Jesus from any philosophical schema that easily organizes the world under a rational gaze, or any intrinsic meaning of history or humanity that gives itself within the immanent unfolding of human engagement with the world, he at the same time misses the fact that Jesus binds himself to the ongoing life of the church—not as a ready-made ‘meta’ principle for engaging contingencies but as the ongoing newly determined temporal existence as those gathered in his Spirit. As a result, Kerr’s notion of the apocalyptic, instead of forming a political subjectivity, acts as the interpretive frame for a general notion of alterity wherein Christ appears in the contingencies of history that seem to take on a more definitive existence than the church itself.

The human speaking and acting and triumphing of this one man directly concerns us all, and His history is our history of salvation which changes the whole human situation, just because God Himself is its human subject in His Son, just because God Himself has assumed and made His own our human nature and kind in His Son, just because God Himself came into this world in His Son, and as one of us “a guest this world of ours He trod.”<sup>68</sup>

Jesus Christ, therefore, is the definitive “point of departure” for history because his history is the event by which all concrete history has its ground and is given its meaning.<sup>69</sup>

Apocalyptically conceived from this historical point of departure, the direction and meaning of history are made known. In Jesus “the qualitative abyss between *logos* (Word) and *sarx* (flesh), between ultimate meaning and contingent humanity, was miraculously bridged,” revealing the real trajectory of history and the manner of its

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<sup>68</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, 51. Thus, having regained a sense of the importance of the concrete and historical reality of God’s action in Jesus Christ through his study of Anselm, Barth’s focus on the event of Christ goes beyond stressing merely the division between time and eternity as he had done in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. Having come into history, and having united himself to humanity in Christ, God acts to reconcile us, as Barth says, “[taking] the lost cause of man... and makes it His own in Jesus Christ, carrying it through to its goal” (IV/1, 3). Thus, for Barth, God gives to us a history because he gives our lives a new and meaningful goal, bringing us into a “common history” with him in which we are incorporated into God’s act of redemption and recreation of the world. In this way, we discover our history to be a “redemptive history” (IV/1, 7,8). That is to say, in the Incarnation God, having joined himself to humanity in Jesus Christ, has made himself our eschaton and in doing so made us new. To this extent, then, our history takes its substance and direction not from some innate quality within humanity but from the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. For more on the structure of Barth’s mature Christology, see George Hunsinger, “Karl Barth’s Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character,” in *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 127–142.

<sup>69</sup> Locating the point of departure for history is the essential problem laid out by Kierkegaard, or Johannes Climacus, in the epigraph to his *Philosophical Fragments* as a response to the totalizing conception of history developed by Hegel. He asks, “Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest; can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?” To this extent, Kierkegaard’s query poses the essential question for history, asking how it is that those within history become conscious of its goal and thereby discover a direction for it. In other words, where is the philosopher of history when she writes the meaning of history? In history? Or, as Hegel thought, at the end of history? For Kierkegaard, as for Barth and Yoder, the answer is not in the philosopher but in Christ and as a result history is not conceived in its totality but apocalyptically. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard’s Writings vol. VII, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

movement.<sup>70</sup> God is moving history toward his purposes, toward his ends; God is reconciling the world to himself, redeeming his creatures in their creaturely existence for full fellowship with him. Real history, thus, is the history of salvation, the story of the reunification of humanity and creation with God in Christ. Directed toward this end, this history also moves in a peculiar way. The movement of history, as Yoder remarks commenting on the vision of John of Patmos in Revelation, is manifest in the “Lamb that was slain”, who alone has the authority and power to break the seals that keep the meaning of history inaccessible hidden. Contrary to the line of thought leading from Thrasymachus to Foucault which sees an indelible connection between brute force and

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<sup>70</sup> Yoder, “Historiography,” 216. Despite the fact that Yoder, no doubt, remains suspicious of the intrinsically Promethean leanings of the theologies of hope which became popular in the liberation theologies that emerged during the sixties and seventies following the Marxist thought of Ernst Bloch, nonetheless a certain affinity for the implications of an apocalyptic orientation upon history can be seen at this point between him and Moltmann. For as Moltmann argues in *Theology of Hope*, “the peculiarity and theological significance of apocalyptic...is not by any means a cosmological interpretation of eschatological history, but an eschatological and historic interpretation of the cosmos.” As a result, he continues, “the *eschaton* would not be a repetition of the beginning, nor a return from the condition of estrangement and the world of sin to the state of original purity, but is ultimately wider than the beginning ever was.” To this extent, then, as he recognizes, an apocalyptic orientation does not lay stress upon some original order of things, or upon the status quo as the vestigial structure of this primordial organization, but instead, within this “apocalyptic outlook...the now universal hope for history would here be setting the cosmos in motion.” Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 136-37. Furthermore, a certain confluence can be seen between Yoder’s position and Moltmann’s critique of “epiphany religions,” wherein “the threat to human existence from the forces of chaos and of annihilation is overcome through the epiphany of the eternal present” (99). This understanding of God’s interaction with humanity, for Moltmann as well as for Yoder, can only succeed in dissolving history and material life, not by saving it.

The imperialistic implications of the type of theology that looks to the eternal and general in preference to the particular and temporal are thoroughly discussed in the groundbreaking work of Willie Jennings. He argues herein that such theology opened itself to become encoded with the very violence of these imperial projects, a force of violence it executed most specifically in the practice of translation. In *The Christian Imagination* he notes, “Israel’s particularity bound up in Jesus means that his scandalous particularity is the means through which Christian faith acquires its social and political materiality. That social and political materiality draws our imaginations not first to the translation of the gospel message but to the joining of peoples in the struggle to learn each other’s languages in the process of lives joined, lives lived together in new spaces, and constituting a new history for a new people” See Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 160-61.



history, Christ reveals that the true movement of history flows through the cross and vulnerability that accompany forgiveness, reconciliation, and love.<sup>71</sup> Hence, for those who know that God is moving history there is no need to try to take control of it or to manage it. A different posture accompanies this history. The fundamental disposition of those following Christ is that of patience, not because they have fallen into a mode of indifference or apathy toward life and the world, but because they know God has acted in the past and is continuing to act in the present and future. That is, the patience of the believing community is borne out of obedience, obedience that imitates Christ whose own life reveals that “the triumph of God’s cause is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection.”<sup>72</sup> With the historical particularity of Jesus as its ground, an apocalyptic conception of history recognizes in him both its end and course.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 232-33. Readers of Plato’s *Republic* will be familiar with the argument of Thrasymachus in Book 1 that justice, or the good of the politic, is determined by the strong. It is an argument that Plato leaves behind, as Thrasymachus eventually falls out of the dialogue, in his attempt to locate a more stable and less relative definition of justice. As Foucault later recognizes, however, this move is consistent with Plato’s prejudice against the Sophists and instead of resolving the place of power in politics simply proceeds by eliminating the dynamics of power from the discourse. See Plato, *Republic*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 983; and Foucault, *Society Must be Defended*, 167-186. As will become evident later, my point here is not to say that Yoder thinks that by avoiding the dynamics of power we can somehow escape the impact of power on and in our lives by simply becoming weak. But it is to say, following Yoder, that “It is not false when people who call themselves ‘realists,’ from Machiavelli to Clausewitz to Reinhold Niebuhr, tell us that power comes from the barrel of a gun. That is one kind of power; but the alternative is not weakness but other kinds of power. It is not that the seers compensate for their being in fact incapacitated, by dreaming vindictively about cosmic catastrophe; it is that to be disarmed after the mode of Christ is to be endowed with the power of truth-telling... and community-building, for which the metaphors of cosmic conflict are most apt because they break the frame of normalcy.” John Howard Yoder, “Ethics and Eschatology,” *Ex Auditu* 6 (1990): 124.

<sup>72</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 232.

<sup>73</sup> Moltmann states that “while apocalyptic does conceive its eschatology in cosmological terms, yet that is not the end of eschatology, but the beginning of an eschatological cosmology or an eschatological ontology for which being becomes historic and the cosmos opens itself to the apocalyptic process.” Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 137. Upon my read, however, Moltmann fails to consistently and thoroughly limn the activity of the church, preferring instead to employ his own general notions of possibility and expectation. Thus, his apocalyptic view tends either to lack a real social expression,

In this conception of history, then, what is revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus radically relativizes all other histories that claim to “make sense” of what is going on in the world. As a result, the events and occurrences that comprise the thread of these other histories are exposed to be incomplete, because when compared the work and event of Christ they are revealed to be human conjectures that disregard God’s action in history.<sup>74</sup> Exposing the limitations of all other attempts to provide history with meaning, a conception of history derived from the revelation of God in Christ offers real hope in the knowledge that God is bringing it to completion. The pretensions of other histories to provide humanity with meaning are uncovered, an alternative future made possible. Hence, when the early church looked toward the end of things, the end made manifest to them through God’s decisive action in Jesus Christ, they did not look at it with despair but with hope. Furthermore, the hopefulness of this conception of history, as Jürgen Moltmann recognizes, gives rise to the prospect of a “labour of hope”, pressing

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continuing to defer its actualization, or to slide easily into a mold of actualization in the human possibilities of political revolution. In contrast, while he does not employ the term “apocalyptic,” I assume because he wants to distance himself from its doomsday popular definition, Graham Ward’s notion of the “eschatological remainder” seems to parallel to some extent the notion of the apocalyptic I develop here. As Ward notes, “Christian eschatology places faith not only in what the Messiah has done but also in what the Messiah will do in bringing all things into God.” Ward, *Politics of Discipleship*, 171. Yet, still it seems that, while Ward does develop a stronger version of messianism in order to combat the weak messianism of Derrida, he ultimately slides at times into the epiphantic view, forgetting to focus much attention on what the Messiah is doing.

<sup>74</sup> Once again, a Kierkegaardian inclination can be seen in the thought of both Barth and Yoder. In his *Philosophical Fragments*, writing under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard introduces an interlude that poses the very question the contingency of history, even for events that have occurred in the past. Here he poses the question: “Is the past more necessary than the future?, or, Has the possible by having become actual, become more necessary than it was?” Since the historical by nature is contingent as a result of its having come into existence, it cannot be the ground of certainty. Only the eternal is necessary, but to speak of the actuality of the eternal places us directly in front of the God-man, that is, the historical point of departure which brings the conditions of certainty with it in its revelation. See Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 72-88.

toward “the new possibilities of human existence on the basis of the ‘phenomenon’ of God’s promise and mission and of the ‘phenomenon’ of the resurrection and the future of Christ.”<sup>75</sup> Through the mode of hope, the believing community can participate in God’s work, embodying its end in *an historic way*. As Yoder puts it, “The ultimate meaning of history is to be found in the work of the church,”<sup>76</sup> as a historical perspective of a new history oriented apocalyptically in hope toward the end God has assured it. In hope, the church knows the end of history and is invited to strive toward it, but the posture of its striving, following the obedience of Jesus, does not imply an attempt to try to control or direct it. In hope, the believing community conceives of history doxologically, knowing more in its confession of the work of God in Christ of the future and the meaning of history than can be read off of the surface. And its life embodies this hopeful confession.

The church’s conception of history, derived from Christ and apocalyptically oriented by hope, is the embodiment of a new age. In fact, within its conception of history, the church is distinguished most essentially from the world as the presence of this new age. As Yoder states,

The New Testament sees our present age—the age of the church, extending from Pentecost to the Parousia—as a period of the overlapping of two aeons. These aeons are not distinct periods of time, for they exist simultaneously. They differ rather in nature or in direction; one points backward to human history outside of (before) Christ; the other points forward to the fullness of the kingdom of God, of which it is a foretaste. Each aeon has a social manifestation: the former in the “world,” the latter in the church or the body of Christ.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 284, 288.

<sup>76</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 151.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

The presence of the new age, or new aeon, is signaled by the worship of the believing community, whose view of history ushers forth from the apprehension that Christ's victory has freed it from the powers that still govern the world. Proclaiming its advent and inhabiting its form of life, the church celebrates the truth of this new "messianic age." Moreover, as it does so it necessarily interacts with these other histories and it "will have effects, making cultural waves, making history happen, both within the believing community and beyond" even as the truth of this end is not dependent upon "verification" by these effects.<sup>78</sup> With respect to the world, the new age, as narratively conceived within the apocalyptic orientation of the church, runs ahead of the old because it is determined by a content that the world is not yet aware of. As it communicates the content of this new age and manifests its presence in its worship and its way of life, the new age collides with the old and leads the world into a new future. Trusting in the ongoing work of God, therefore, the community carves out a new history conceived as the unfolding of the new age. In doing so, it exhibits hope and patience which mark the way it approaches the future.

At the heart of the church's apocalyptic conception of history is its experience of the new age, present in the social manifestations of its worship and way of life. And implied within the experience of the new age, is a new experience of time. To fully understand the church's conception of history and of itself as the presence of a new age, therefore, requires that I describe the qualitative transformation of time that comprises the core of an apocalyptic orientation. For, it is this new experience of time that informs and

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<sup>78</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 37.

orchestrates the collective life of the believing community and gives rise to its notion of the new age as a way of historically making sense of its existence in the world. It is this apocalyptic experience of time I turn to now.

### *Christ and Apocalyptic Temporality*

If the reign of God established in Christ has initiated a new age, then the heart of this new age is a new experience of time. At the core of the believing community's conception of history and giving rise to its hopeful participation in the work of God is a qualitative transformation of time. It is an apocalyptic time implicit in the community's worship as the community embodies the celebration of its end in God and in its mission as it interfaces with the world, distinguishing it from the world. It is from this socio-cultural experience of time that the church's conception of history arises, informing and establishing it.<sup>79</sup> Thus it is this experience of time that most centrally constitutes this people. As I will propose, it is by inhabiting the rhythm, tempo, and movement of this new temporality determined by the content of the new age that the believing community most distinctively enacts its unique, and redemptive, way of life. For implicit in this new experience of time, and shaped and conditioned by it, is the activation of a new agency, and as I will conclude in the following section, a new political subjectivity.

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<sup>79</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (New York: Verso, 2007), 99. In the essay, "Time and History: Critique of the Instant and the Continuum" in this volume, Agamben states, "Every conception of history is invariably accompanied by a certain experience of time which is implicit in it, conditions it, and thereby has to be elucidated. Similarly, every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alternation in this experience."

Humans are time-bound creatures; we are finite. And our experience of time orients our engagement with ourselves and our world. A sense of time conditions human knowledge and self-consciousness, for it is within the fabric of time that these are formed. Before I consider what it means to be oriented by an apocalyptic sense of time, I want to present a typological framework for how different philosophies (theologies) understand the relationship between truth, time, and history. The typology I will present is one laid out by the twentieth century French intellectual and Russian émigré Alexandre Kojève in his *Lectures on Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>80</sup> As I will suggest, Kojève's explication of these philosophical approaches will help me to clarify the peculiarity of a Christian understanding of the relationship between time, truth, and history. Because in Jesus Christ the truth of God has entered time and become temporal, this historic truth has engendered a qualitative transformation in time corresponding with its content. Thus, I will argue that because the revelation of God in Christ changes time by entering into it, it is by nature a political act, establishing a community contiguous with the truth it manifests within time and which shapes new agents whose actions together are oriented by this apocalyptic event.

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<sup>80</sup> See Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969). Kojève delivered these lectures over a course of seven years, between 1933-1939, at the École des Hautes Études and in them presented a uniquely attractive, if enigmatic, interpretation of Hegel's thought that blended him with Marx and Heidegger and was particularly influential on an entire generation of young French thinkers. This translation, however, does not include the entirety of these lectures. For the complete text of these lectures, see Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel : leçons sur La phénoménologie de l'esprit, professées de 1933 à 1939 à l'École des hautes-études*, réunies et pub. par Raymond Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1947). For more on Kojève's influence, see Shadia B. Drury, *Alexandre Kojève: The Roots of Postmodern Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

Kojève takes up the theme of the relationship between time and eternity, or time and the Concept, in lectures six through eight of his deliberations on Hegel's philosophy.<sup>81</sup> In order to clarify Hegel's conception of the relationship between the Concept (*Begriff*) and time (*Zeit*), or truth and time, Kojève lists the four dominant philosophical conceptions of this relationship. The first of these philosophical perspectives, and the one he associates with both Parmenides and Spinoza, equates the truth with eternity. What quickly becomes evident, however, is that because the truth is thought to be eternity itself, it remains completely incomprehensible and ineffable in its simplicity. And as Kojève notes, the result is a philosophical acosmism due to the fact that truth conceived this way implies that it cannot relate to time because it cannot relate to anything other than itself.<sup>82</sup>

The second approach, outlined by Kojève, equates the truth to the eternal, which unlike eternity is relatable to something other than itself and, therefore, to time. Two possible lines of formulation arise within this broader conception: the ancient pagan formulation that relates the eternal concept to eternity and the classical Judeo-Christian formulation that relates the eternal concept to time. Moreover, the first of these alternatives (the ancient pagan that relates the truth, as eternal, to eternity) can be further broken down into two variants, one prevalent in Plato and the other developed by Aristotle. Simply put, the Platonic formulation of the relationship between the eternal concept (or truth) and eternity conceives of the eternal as residing outside of time, as is

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<sup>81</sup> These three lectures are contained in chapter 5 of Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 100-49.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 102, 119-125.

implicit in Plato's theory of the forms.<sup>83</sup> Describing this Platonic variant, Kojève states, "Hence, even though [Truth and the Concept] are in Time, they nonetheless have no relations with Time and the temporal."<sup>84</sup> The Aristotelian conception, on the other hand, conceives of the eternal within time, where the unchanging nature of truth (or the eternal concept) is guaranteed by the eternality of the cosmos whose eternal circular movement implies that time itself is eternal.<sup>85</sup> Summarizing this conception he observes, "[Time] is circular, but the circle is gone around again and again, eternally" in a way that ties the "eternal eddies" of temporal flux to the "eternal, immutable axis" through their "entelechy." In this way, "the cosmos has the same structure as does the animal."<sup>86</sup> Where Plato's conception is geometrical in nature, Aristotle's is biological. In distinction to the line of thought presented in these two pagan philosophers, another way of conceiving of the relation between truth and time, Kojève asserts, is at work in Kant's philosophy. Kant, according to Kojève, does not conceive of the eternal in relation to eternity (whether outside in geometrically conceived realm of the forms or inside and implicit to biological existence). Instead, Kant believes the eternal to be related to time but with limitations. Thus, Kant devises a skeptical philosophy that is geometrical in its construction but thinks that while knowledge can increase, full knowledge of the truth is not ultimately possible. The circle cannot be fully closed because the realm of real forms is inaccessible from within time.<sup>87</sup> Thus, if a Platonic conception ultimately leads to a

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 102-13.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 113-15.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 116-17, 122-26.



radical transcendentalism trapped in a perspective that tends to emphasize a disembodied apprehension of truth and an Aristotelian conception ultimately leaves the human trapped within the fate of eternal recurrence of time, then Kant, as Kojève reads him, was the first to recognize the very temporal nature of human knowledge itself. But, of course, this meant it was radically limited and somewhat alienated from the truth.

Kant, therefore, while still operating within the second philosophical approach that sees the truth as eternal, constructs another variant because he grasps the fundamental temporal nature of human thought itself. Explicating this profound discovery of Kant Kojève is worth quoting at length:

[For Kant] in order that there be knowledge, the diverse must be *identified*: every act of knowing is a *synthesis*, [he] says, which introduces *unity* into the (given) manifold. Now for us, the diverse can be identical only in Time or as Time. Therefore, for us, knowledge—that is, the identification of the diverse—can be accomplished only *in* Time, because the very identification of the diverse *is* Time. It was always known that the human Concept appears at some moment *of* Time; and it was known that Man needs time in order to think. But Kant was the first to see that this is not accidental, but essential to Man. Hence the World in which Man thinks is necessarily a *temporal* World. And if actual human thought is related to what is *in* Time, the Kantian analysis shows that *Time* is what makes the actual exercise of thought possible. In other words, we can use our eternal Concepts only provided that we relate them to Time as such—that is, provided we “schematize” them—as Kant says.<sup>88</sup>

I will return to Kant’s conception of time in the second part of this study, as a philosophical configuration of time correlated to the dominion of capital and operative in an attempt to schematize the world and to subject it to human mastery through the homogenization of time as a quantified experience. However, what is important for my

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 126-27.

argument at this point is that Kant's conception of knowledge recognizes the necessarily temporal nature of human consciousness and its knowledge, even as he distorts the Christian structure of this insight by universalizing and secularizing it. Nonetheless, Kant realizes that it is only through the temporal fabric of the imagination that humans are able to schematize the diversity of our intuitions. Thus, it is only through temporalizing our concepts that they can really have content for us. To this extent, however, Kant's philosophy remains dependent on the idea of a "transcendental I" or a transcendental synthesis of apperception, or a will, that applies this schematization in a movement prior to, or outside of, time.<sup>89</sup> Hence, both the object of human knowledge in itself, just as the "I" in itself, remain beyond the realm of knowledge. Thus, while optimistic, Kant's philosophy is intrinsically one of critical skepticism.

The Kantian framework, however, gives rise to the third conception of the relation between truth and time found in the philosophy of Hegel. Hegel, as Kojève explains, goes beyond Kant, posing the idea that truth is time; that is to say, that through time or in history truth unfolds. Where Kant's philosophy is never quite able to locate the continuity of the world that makes history possible, Hegel would discover that it is the continuity of history itself, seen from its end, which provides the vantage point in time for the arrival of complete knowledge. Thus, truth is time as the whole of time, a knowledge necessarily achieved by humanity only at the end of its history.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 130-48.

While Kojève finds this Hegelian perspective to be the most philosophically compelling, as it is the source and focus of his own thought, he does, however, point to a fourth alternative for conceiving of the relationship between truth and time. It is an alternative he associates with the Sophists and radical skeptics. The basic structure of this approach is to conceive of the truth as temporal, a perspective he quickly dismisses as unphilosophical due to the fact that the variable nature of the temporal renders true knowledge impossible.<sup>91</sup> Yet, I want to suggest that it is within the register of this final variant that a Christian apocalyptic orientation rests.<sup>92</sup> Because it is at base the belief that truth has come into time in a specific occurrence, Christianity apocalyptically conceived is by nature first and foremost political, as a new experience of time determined by the event of this truth. It is political because it does conceive of the relation between truth and time in any of the above three ways, but instead, perceives the truth to have appeared in time in the person of Jesus Christ, whose kingdom determines the experience of time that forms the believing community. The truth of God revealed in time has established a new political presence, because when God appears in time he does not leave time unchanged. The content of the event of this truth thus gives rise to a new people,

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>92</sup> It would not be wrong in this respect to see a certain affinity between the apocalyptic approach I am outlining and that of Nietzsche. Nietzsche rejects the four philosophical approaches identified Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, and Kant, though following Deleuze he may be closer at times to Spinoza and certain elements of Aristotle. For Nietzsche, more closely associated with the Sophist strain, a new orientation to time is based in a will-of-power that accepts the fluctuating given of the cosmos and aim for the beauty of self-assertion within this given as a means of escaping the nihilism of modern thought. The critical difference that distinguishes the apocalyptic orientation from this Nietzschean one, however, is the Christological core of the apocalyptic, emphasizing the invasion of God into time and the resulting transformation of it. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All*, trans. Adrian del Caro, ed. Adrian del Caro and Robert B. Pippin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

conditioned and configured by an experience of time correlated to this event and embodied by them in a peculiar rhythm and tempo of their common life.

Having come into time, Jesus transforms time, opening time with new content: the truth realized in him. His life, death, resurrection, and ascension are the heart of history and he is the event that qualitatively changes time by filling it with the sovereign reign of God. To reiterate, Barth reminds us that Jesus's existence "was not one moment of time among and after and before many others, but fulfilled *καιρος* – the moment of the event, the Word, to which every past word or event can only move, just as every future word or event can only move to the revelation of its actual scope."<sup>93</sup> Thus, for Barth, Christ is the center of all things; he is the fullness, or the filling up, of time as the purpose, substance, and meaning of history and the restorer of the cosmos. To know time in relation to the truth of him is, therefore, to tell time differently. Such is clear in Paul's apocalyptic orientation. Having instructed the church in Rome on how to relate to the ruling authorities and having admonished them to "owe no one anything, except to love one another," he exhorts them to embody this ethic as a way of life in concert with the new time made realized in Christ. He writes, "you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer now than when we became

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<sup>93</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/ 2, 200. Commenting on the uniqueness of the Christ-event as a historical reality, Thomas Torrance elaborates on Barth's point, saying, "this is a historical happening not of the kind that fades away from us and crumbles into the dust, but of the kind that remains real and therefore that resists corruption and moves the other way, forward throughout all history to the end-time and to the consummation of all things in the new creation. Jesus remains live and a real historical happening, more real and more historical than any other historical event, for this is the only historical event that does not suffer from decay and is not threatened by annihilation and illusion. It is historical event in the fullness of time, and not historical event suffering, as all other historical events do, from the privation of time. Here time itself is redeemed and recreated, and as such is carried forward into the future, for it is not allowed to see the corruption of the grave." Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 95.

believers” (Rom. 13:11). The point is that under the reign of God established in Christ, love has fulfilled the law, transforming time as creaturely existence is reconciled to God. To know this much is to experience time differently; it is to know their time as given by God and in the occurrence of Jesus unified with him. He is the “Lord of time,” as his occurrence determines time.<sup>94</sup> An apocalyptic and dynamic sense of time emerges, one determined by the reign the event of Christ has accomplished.

Following, Kojève’s helpful typology, then, brings the nature of this qualitatively different time to light. If Kant, as representative of a Judeo-Christian sense of time that is not apocalyptically formed, remains committed to a geometrical representation of time grounded, though opaquely, in the autonomous transcendental “I”, then the uncompleted circle becomes an infinite line. As time-bound creatures, humans trust that the truth relates to time and that within the fabric of time (space/time) we can come ever closer to this truth. But certainty and full truth remain impossible for finite creatures. The closest approximation of truth comes through attempting, as much as possible, to align one’s life with and on the principles of reason.<sup>95</sup> If, apocalyptically, however, the truth has become

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<sup>94</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 437ff. Anthea Portier-Young notes that for Jewish apocalyptic writers such as Daniel, the issue of God’s sovereignty over time is of central concern. Commenting on this theme, she observes that one of the primary things the prophet is attempting to convey is that “God alone changes times.” Against an oppressive regime that was attempting to squelch the rhythms of Jewish worship by eliminating and changing its calendar, Daniel reminds the people that “Inherent in the effort to change the calendar, halt regular, existing religious practices, and replace them with new ones was an attempt to forcibly deny the sovereignty of the God the Jews worshipped and to coopt their time-consciousness into an alternately constructed reality.” Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 180-1.

<sup>95</sup> As discussed above, this is essentially the process of “schematization” described by Kant in the first chapter of II.1.2 of his *Critique of Pure Reason*. As the organizing mechanism for the substance of thought, that is, as the fundamental quality of the “transcendental schema”, Kant explains here, that time is the element of human consciousness through which we “homogenize” our representations of the object in imagination with the categories of pure understanding. Because time is “the formal condition of the manifold of inner sense” as well as “contained in every empirical representation of the manifold,” it “mediates the subsumption of the latter under the former,” making concepts possible by means of this

temporal, then a perspective on truth emerges that is the inverse of Hegel's solution to the Kantian antinomy and to his skepticism. It is a sense of the relation of truth to time that runs through a particular occurrence, evincing an experience of time, a rhythm and tempo, consistent with the content of this event. Having become temporal in Jesus Christ, truth is not equated to the whole of time as it is for Hegel. Instead, truth is known to be particular, a particular truth whose content determines dynamically—like a repeating beat that resonates throughout one's entire being—the sense of time and hence gives rise to a specific socio-political presence. Acknowledging the indelible relation of time to consciousness, therefore, the advent of the reign of God in Christ initiates a qualitative

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“transcendental time-determination” (272). The fact that this operation remains transcendental is due to the fact that we can never have an image of this operation, but can only sense it as time (the inner sense of this operation), which is also the shape of inner sense itself and the root element of each of the categories of understanding insofar as we can sense them. Thus, before going on to describe how our sense of each category of the understanding is derived in and from its relation to time, Kant states, “The schema of a pure concept of the understanding...is something that can never be brought to an image at all, but is rather only the pure synthesis, in accord with a rule of unity according to concepts in general, which the category expresses, and is a transcendental product of the imagination, which concerns the determination of the inner sense in general, in accordance with conditions of its form (time) in regard to all representations, insofar as these are to be connected together *a priori* in one concept in accord with the unity of apperception” (274). In other words, for him, our inner sense of this synthetic unity is time and it is through time that we also construct concepts of our experience, which also appear to us in the form of time. The implicit schema of time is a line, an image most closely associated with the continuity of synthetic unity of apperception, or the “I” (271). See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998). The limits intrinsic to Kant's perspective are obvious; for him, ultimate truth remains outside of our temporal experience and to this we have no access. But, at the same time, it resides in Time, as Kojève recognizes, but in a way that exists in Time “*before* the temporal properly so called.” Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 116. As he continues, “seeing the difficulties that Plato and Aristotle encountered by relating the eternal Concept to Eternity, Kant had the unheard-of audacity to relate it to Time (and not, of course, to the temporal—i.e. to what is *in* Time)” (117). Furthermore, while the “transcendental I” for Kant is Eternity and therefore in principle the concepts-categories of understand are eternal because they precede what is in time and are valid at every moment of time (124), we do not have access to them in this eternal state. Because “human thought is accomplished in Time, and it is a temporal phenomenon... it is purely empirical: it is *doxa*. But in order that the (eternal) Concept be applied to the *temporal*, it is first necessary to ‘schematize’ the Concept—that is, to apply it to Time as such” (127). That is to say, in humanity itself, in human thought and in and through the function of human reason, the eternal relates to time by means of an unexplainable coalescence of forces, the free action of the will and the dynamics of the physical world.

transformation of time that determines the subjectivity of those caught up in this experience and sets the conditions for their knowledge of things. Coming into time, the eternal opens time up, transforms it, filling it with a beat or charge resonant with its content. A subjectivity determined by this new experience of time is set within a new tempo and new rhythm that forms and guides its life, moving it in a new direction.

I will return to discuss the nature of this apocalyptic political subjectivity below. At present, however, I want to elucidate the transformation of time I have been outlining by looking at the reading of Paul offered by the Italian political theorist and philosopher Giorgio Agamben. In his book *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, Agamben, whose political writings have set out to expose the inevitable complication, horrors, and possibilities for liberation within prevailing conceptions of sovereignty, discovers in Paul an entirely new sense of time opened up by the event of the Messiah—the political title he reminds us is implied in the very use of the term *Christos*.<sup>96</sup> Working from the theological and political concepts of both Barth, albeit through Jacob Taubes, and Walter Benjamin, Agamben develops a conception of “messianic time” that helps to clarify the experience of time underlying what I have called an apocalyptic orientation. While Agamben’s perspective has not been accepted without strongly voiced critique,<sup>97</sup> his interpretation of Paul’s sense of time will elucidate

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<sup>96</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 15-16.

<sup>97</sup> One of the most ardent critics of Agamben has been his fellow countryman, Antonio Negri. Negri takes umbrage with what he sees as Agamben’s “[attempt] to find a new positivity on the negative margin of the world.” And Negri goes on to argue that “[Agamben] attempts to construct an ontology of the margin, complicating the constitutive process of the immanent subject by contrasting it with the singular difference and the negative repetition of experience;” it is an attempt Negri ultimately sees as bankrupt due

the apocalyptic perspective that shapes the political subjectivity of the believing community and informs its social, economic, and political processes. In this experience of time, the entire culture of the community comes into concert with God's purposes and moves with and toward its end in his kingdom. When exploited for its full theological import, I think Agamben's insights illuminate the Christological resonance of the believing community's sense of time and the way this experience engenders a particular use of the time given to it, infusing it with a new agency.

For Paul, Agamben argues, the event of Jesus the Messiah is the transformation of *chronos* as *kairos*. Whereas *chronos* is usually understood as the linear, or sequential, quantitative sense of time, *kairos* implies a heightened or more pregnant, qualitative instance of time, a moment that holds great significance or the time of a presence. Where chronic time is stale and disjointed, *kairotic* time is dynamic, the time of occurrence. But beyond merely pointing to the distinction between these two notions of time, Agamben asserts that Paul is more concerned with the "relation between them."<sup>98</sup> The qualitative difference between these two should not overly emphasize their opposition, as "*kairos* is nothing more than a seized *chronos*."<sup>99</sup> Whereas *chronos* designates a sequential and

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to its inherently theological proclivities. See Antonio Negri, "The Political Subject and Absolute Immanence," in *Theology and the Political*, 234. Also from the theological community, Paul Griffiths and Alexandra Brown have recently formulated critiques of Agamben's appropriation of Pauline theology by noting his inattentiveness to the motif of the crucifixion of Jesus within Paul's thought. See Alexandra Brown, "Paul and Agency in the Time that Remains: 1 Corinthians in Messianic Perspective," (presented at SBL, Boston, November 22-25, 2008); and Paul J. Griffiths, "The Staurocentric Fulcrum of Politics: Expropriating Agamben on Paul," (delivered at St. Paul's Journey into Philosophy, Vancouver, BC, June 4-6, 2008).

<sup>98</sup> Agamben, *Time That Remains*, 68.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.



measurable time, *kairos* is an experience of time determined by the content of an event, a “seized *chronos*.”<sup>100</sup> For Agamben, then, following Walter Benjamin, the time of the Messiah’s arrival, or messianic time, is *kairotic* time; it is now-time (*Jetztzeit*).<sup>101</sup> It is a full time, a “moment” from which and within which the past and the future are changed by an occurrence of cosmic proportion.<sup>102</sup> It is revolutionary. It is not, however, the end of time. It does not annihilate time or cause it to seize up. But, as a qualitative transformation of time it opens chronic time, introducing an experience of “*the time that*

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. It seems clear to me that what Agamben attempts to outline here is an experience of time that is the inverse of that described by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. If for Heidegger, though admittedly these lectures were ultimately a failure, being is within the grasp of time, reducible to time and subjected to its flux, then Agamben, following upon Hannah Arendt’s notion of natality, hopes to define a sense of time seized by being. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996); and Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 51. As Vivian Liska points out, the emphasis on the agency associated with this inversion is also the point at which Agamben so fervently disagrees with Derrida. She writes, “For Agamben, the constitutive inability of Derridean deconstruction to reach closure partakes in perpetuating the prevailing dismal condition of humanity through an attitude that he terms ‘a petrified or paralyzed messianism.’” And she goes on to note that “Against Derrida, Agamben recovers aspects of Benjamin’s messianic thinking that foreground the urgency to terminate deferral and to grasp the messianic potential of every moment in the present.” Vivian Liska, “The Legacy of Benjamin’s Messianism: Giorgio Agamben and Other Contenders,” in *A Companion to the Works of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Rolf J Goebel (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009) 196-97.

<sup>101</sup> Benjamin’s indebtedness to the Kabalistic tradition is evident, as he attempts to provide historical materialism with a sense of time that is theologically influenced. For, whereas the category of progress operates within the field of “a homogenous, empty time,” real history “is the subject of a construction whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled full by now-time [*Jetztzeit*].” Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938-1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. and ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006), 395.

<sup>102</sup> The “Moment” is a concept developed by Kierkegaard in order to set the particularity of Christ outside of the all-encompassing, historical dialectic of Hegel. It is a concept he seeks to rehabilitate from the Greek overtones he determines to be at work in the phenomenology of Hegel by relating it to his notion of repetition. As will become evident below, Kierkegaard’s concept of repetition has profoundly shaped my entire discussion of heterogeneous *kairotic* time. Similarly, it is picked up by Barth in his *Romerbrief* as a concept that allows him to break from the anthropocentrism of German Protestant Liberal theology, setting it over and outside of the homogenous notion of time fashioned by and experienced solely within human possibility. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, vol. VI, *Kierkegaard’s Writings*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 148-49; Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 497-98.

*time takes to come to an end.*”<sup>103</sup> Hence, messianic time is not an additional time or a supplemental time; it is not a time added to chronological time. Instead, for Agamben, it is a time internal to chronological time that has effected a change in the experience of time. Determined by the content of the messianic event, *kairotic* time is a sense of chronic time contracted in on itself, the “operational time pressing within the chronological time, working and transforming it from within; it is the time we need to make time end: *the time that is left us.*”<sup>104</sup> Instead of merely ending time, the occurrence engenders a new experience of time with which the believing community abides. As Agamben notes, for Paul, “The Messiah has already arrived, the messianic event has already happened, but its presence contains within itself another time, which stretches its *parousia*, not in order to defer it, but, on the contrary, to make it graspable.”<sup>105</sup>

For Agamben, a dynamic sense of time accompanies (or is implicit in) any representation of time as a result of the remainder that escapes this representation. Because any representation of time cannot fully account for the time it takes to create the representation, there is a time-in-operation intrinsic to any representation of it.<sup>106</sup> Every image-concept of time is accompanied by an operational time: the time, however short, it takes for the mind to formulate an image. To clarify Agamben’s point, take the reading of a novel as an example. There is within every novel, the time of the story or the

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<sup>103</sup> Agamben, *Time That Remains*, 67.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 67-68.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 65-6. Agamben does shy away from the term apocalyptic because he tends to think of it as a distorted understanding of messianic time, one that misunderstands messianic time as the end of time. Hence, while his refusal to acknowledge the complete theological significance of the cross and resurrection lead him to draw a stronger distinction between these two concepts, I think his understanding of messianic time is more proximate to the notion of apocalyptic I have been developing than the vulgar sense of the term he attempts to distance himself from. See Ibid., 62-64.

chronological time of the narrative itself. But there is also the time intrinsic to the *reading* of the novel, a time that is not accounted for in the time of the narrative. And this excess of time, the time of the reading, is an operational time internal to the time of the story because it is the time through which one engages the time of the narrative as a reader. This operational time, the time of reading in my example, remains at the heart of any and every chronic time. An internal excess of time, it is a dynamic time that is determined by its content and, as Agamben points out, it coordinates the way one engages with chronic time. Accordingly, he thinks that for Paul the occurrence of the event of the Messiah, Jesus, has altered this dynamic, operational time, opening a new way to engage chronic time. A transformed experience of time correlated to the event of the Messiah emerges, one in which time is fully operational because it is redirected to the meaning and significance of the kingdom. For Paul, the past and the present are recapitulated, or summed up in the Messiah, as Jesus fills time with a new pulse setting it to use without ending it.<sup>107</sup> Messianically construed, time is dynamically reconfigured not so as to annihilate time but to transform it and to make it usable for a higher purpose both in its operational and chronic dimensions.

The experience of messianic time, then, comes as a call (*klesis*), reorienting one vocationally within her present location. Commenting on Paul's notion of re-vocation implied in the adverbial "as not" of I Cor. 7:29-32, Agamben states, "*Use*. This is the definition Paul gives to messianic life in the form of the *as not*. To live messianically

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<sup>107</sup> Agamben, *Time that Remains*, 74-83.

means ‘to use’ *klesis*; conversely, messianic *klesis* is something to use, not to possess.”<sup>108</sup> Making use in this way is not an act of dominion, for it is not based in a right or in possession. It is not something owned by the one who is called. Instead, by very nature of the calling, one is provided the use of something, namely her current location, which is not owned by her but can be plied for a new alternative purpose. The call renders inoperative the old location, infusing it with possibility of using it toward a different end thereby enjoying in it new significance.<sup>109</sup>

Pulling Agamben’s read in a more confessional direction by repositioning his messianism within an explicitly Christological register, I want to suggest that the transformation of time by Christ calls the believer into a radically new experience of time coincident with the reign of God and his kingdom. In Yoder’s terms, this transformation of time is the inauguration of a “new age”, or a “new aeon,” one characterized by the dynamic presence of the reign of God and the time he gives to his creatures in Jesus to commune with him and to participate in his work.<sup>110</sup> Because Christ has opened time, filling it and fulfilling it with the pulse of his dynamic presence, the community oriented by this event discovers that it is given time anew by God to use in the vocation of his

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>110</sup> Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 36-7; and Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 146-52. While I have relied on some of the insights provided by Agamben’s engagement with Paul, there is a fundamental disagreement between my theological account of operational time and his more humanist conception. For Agamben, messianic time remains an immanent aspect within time itself, one that can be exploited to make political change. In my account, however, the qualitative transformation of time in the Incarnation, that is, the categorical transformation of time as a result of the transcendent God having entered time, gives the believing community a new time dynamically reconfigured to his reign. As Douglass Harink notes, “It is important to emphasize, in contrast to Agamben, that for Paul ‘the messianic’ is not an indeterminate concept, but is defined and determined by the life, crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus (Phil. 2:6-11).” Douglas Harink, “Introduction: From Apocalypse to Philosophy—and Back,” in *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision*, 308, n. 68.

purposes. “This means both that the church’s presence constitutes a part of the promise that more is to come...but also that its quality and direction have begun to be manifest.”<sup>111</sup> Those operating within a tempo and rhythm resonant with the life and work of Jesus, embody a new culture based in this new experience of time and as the non-identical repetition of it. The community marks the presence of the new age in the Spirit, pursuing the new ends of the kingdom within the old by freely exploiting her location to further the reconciling and salvific purposes of God.<sup>112</sup> As Barth puts it, within the community of the called, “the time of Jesus Christ takes the place of our time, coming to us as a glad message presented to us as a promise, and to be seized and lived in by us.”<sup>113</sup> For Paul, as for Barth and Yoder, because God in Jesus Christ has reconciled humanity to himself, they are called in their creaturely existence to be instruments or ambassadors of the good news of that reconciliation, the first fruits of a new creation (II Cor. 5: 17-20). Having become slaves to Christ, they are freed to be citizens of the new age, given time to use in devotion to God’s ends.

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<sup>111</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 126.

<sup>112</sup> Putting her finger on one internal problem to Agamben’s work, and one which I believe can be circumnavigated with a Christocentric reading of Paul, Vivian Liska observes that Agamben’s thought “calls for an integral actuality, that is, of a fulfilled now-time without tension, displacement, and deferral. While Benjamin’s ‘Jetztzeit’ contains worldly splinters pointing to messianic fulfillment, Agamben’s ‘now’ can be understood as an attempt to think a ‘pure’ interruption, free of all mediation, conception, and precondition, uninfected by a world that presents itself as one continuous catastrophe. The urgency, however, that is constantly conjured up in Agamben’s thinking, stands in curious contrast to the emptiness that is simultaneously appealed to.” Liska, “The Legacy,” 208. While we can see the weakness of Agamben’s thought here, we also see the great possibility presented to us by it. For my argument, the emptiness that tends to plague the center of Agamben’s thinking is filled by the resurrected Christ, a point I realize that sets me at odds with him. My critique of Agamben runs similar to that made by Graham Ward, who states, that in Agamben’s read of Paul not only does the *parousia* have nothing to do with the return of Christ, but “The Christ event is also left behind too quickly.” Ward, *Politics Of Discipleship*, 175-76.

<sup>113</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 55.

Implied by the advent of the new age is that “the present form of this world is passing away” (I Cor. 7: 29-31). The transformation of time, resulting from its being gathered up into the dynamic life of God, produces a newly pulsating life that the time of the old age, lost to decay and death cannot prevail against. A death to death, creaturely existence in this transformation is not annihilated, but restored and recreated so as to bring it in concert with the life of God. As Barth puts it, the old age is composed of “our time,” a time of human rebellion that strips humanity of its sacred relation to God and leaves us captive to an empty shell of time characterized by homogenous units of decay. In it humanity is “isolated from God and fallen into sin” and trapped within a “lost time” of degeneration and death. But because God presents us with “new time” in Christ which “He wills to give us again as the time of grace,” the extinction of this old age and its decrepit, chronic time is sealed as “God creates from our lost time His time of grace.”<sup>114</sup> Opening our lost time from within in the occurrence of Jesus, God restores time to his creatures, providing them with time in which they can commune with and enjoy him.<sup>115</sup> As Yoder puts it,

The idea that fulfillment is timeless is itself the most clearly nonbiblical of these positions... In biblical thought, the eternal is not atemporal. It is not less like time, but more like time. It is like time to a higher degree. The kingdom is not immaterial, but is more like reality than reality is. If real events are the center of history—certainly the cross was a real event, certainly the resurrection is testified to as in some sense a real event—then the fulfillment and culmination of God’s purposes must also be really historic. The God of the Bible is not timeless... We cannot conceive of an

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., III/1, 72-73.

<sup>115</sup> Hilary C. Martin, “Eternity and Temporality in the Theology of Karl Barth,” *Science and Christian Belief* 21, no. 2 (2009): 105, 102. As Martin notes, the reason this is even possible for Barth to say is because Barth understands the eternal Triune life of God to be the “prototype” of time itself. God’s eternity makes time possible (102).

atemporal God reconcilable with the biblical vision of God. We can conceive of a hypertemporal God, who is more temporal than we are, who is ahead of us and behind us, before us and after us, above us in several directions, and who has more of the character of timeliness and meaningfulness in movement rather than less.<sup>116</sup>

The advent of the new age, while prompting the waning of the old, is not experienced as the annihilation of time by an atemporal and disembodied eternity. It is instead the victorious encroachment of transformed time of the kingdom, opening creaturely life itself, its structures and powers from the inside through the invasion of a new, higher experience of time.

As I have argued, under the rebellion of the structures and powers and tracking with their history, time itself has been pulled out of joint; it traces a path and rhythm that moves away from God into decay and annihilation. Such are things in the old age. As the heart of a form of life, this disjointed time shapes human agents to conform to this trajectory of degeneration. A time that is always being lost, it gives shape to lost lives.<sup>117</sup> Thus, in order to save that which was lost, God's invasion of this disjointed time in the occurrence of Christ resets time, instituting a qualitative transformation of it correlated to his reign. And the pulse, tempo, and rhythm intrinsic to this new experience of time condition the life of the community that lives and works in fidelity to this event. A new

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<sup>116</sup> Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 276. I must thank Stanley Hauerwas for pointing me to this page in Yoder's work, for it lies at the center of this entire project. The extent to which my own thought has been shaped by Hauerwas, as many readers will recognize, cannot be sufficiently accounted for because his teaching resides under and behind every line. See also, Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 67-68.

<sup>117</sup> As Barth argues, because life after the fall is dominated by the rebellion of the powers against God, "Our time, the time we know and possess is and remains lost time." Thus, having become disorientated from "God-created time," if we are to discover a new time wherein God has time for us, then, "it must be a different time, a third time, created alongside of our time and the time originally created by God." Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 47. This third time, he continues, arises with revelation, that is, with the event of Jesus Christ. And it is a time in which "[God] is free for us, because He is with us and amongst us, because, in short, without ceasing to be what He is, He also becomes what we are" (49).

people inhabiting a new age it exhibits a radical heterogeneity to the form of the world. Within an apocalyptic orientation the new age inaugurated and instituted in the event of Christ transforms creaturely existence, “opening the road to life in time.”<sup>118</sup> Just as the breaking of the sovereignty of the powers and structures of the old cosmos does not destroy or do away with them, so God does not save humanity by annihilating creaturely existence. Because time is not alien to God, God resets, transforms time, realigning creatures in our temporality to his own life. Establishing a new dynamic and *kairotic* sense of time determined by the event of Christ and correlated to God’s reign in and through him, a new people constituted in this experience of time and oriented by its tempo and rhythm arises. An apocalyptic community oriented by the transformation of time achieved in Jesus Christ and inhabiting his new age, they are freed to make use of the time they are given within their current location to pursue the end of God’s kingdom.

Engaging with the notion of messianic time developed by Giorgio Agamben’s reading of Paul’s letter to the Romans, while refracting it through the Christocentric theology of Barth and Yoder, I have thus sought to describe the qualitative transformation of time that resides at the heart of an apocalyptic orientation. Based in an experience of time resonant with the occurrence of Jesus, I suggested that the believing community is instilled with a new agency, one activated by the call of God and enacted in making use

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<sup>118</sup> Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 31. Moltmann remarks later in this volume that “The proclamation of Christ thus places men in the midst of an event of revelation which embraces the nearness of the coming Lord. It thereby makes the reality of man ‘historic’ and stakes it on history” (139). I have already noted the issue I see in Moltmann’s conception of history, but nonetheless I think he presents a good corrective in his stress on the material nature of Christian hope to theologies that tend to foreground contemplation as the mode through which creatures ultimately commune with God. Moltmann develops a thorough critique of what he calls “epiphany religions” as theologies that tend to stress the eternity of God in a way that discounts history and temporality. The result of such theologies, he notes, is that they inevitably tend toward immaterialism (99).



of the time given to each member for the pursuit of God's purposes. In this way, moreover, the community marks the continued presence of the new age and its infiltration of the old age. The church, therefore, as it remains oriented by this apocalyptic transformation of time, embodies the real work of God to restore his creatures to life with him. Enjoying and working with the time God has given it, the believing community as it remains faithful to the event of Christ, while it may frequently falter, is the first taste of the presence of the God's kingdom and the promise that more of life with God is to come. As already intimated, therefore, engendered by the new experience of time instituted by Christ is a new political subjectivity, one resonant with the reign of God and oriented to his ends. It is the nature of this apocalyptic political subjectivity that I want to describe below in the final section of this chapter.

#### *Apocalyptic Political Subjectivity*

Throughout the technical engagement of this chapter with the concepts of cosmology, sovereignty, history, and time, I have hinted at the notion of an alternative political subjectivity intrinsic to the apocalyptic orientation of the believing community and resonant with the reign of God. Now that I have described the transformation of time that accompanies the event of Christ I can delineate it. Because it is with respect to time that humans are conscious of themselves in the world, that is, it is through our experience of time that we come to conceive of ourselves, our relations with one another, our world, and ourselves as agents indelibly connected to that world, the qualitative transformation of time propagated by the occurrence of Jesus imparts a new subjectivity. As the fabric of

the imagination, one's experience of time orients her in the world and to herself. Therefore, an apocalyptic sense of time, I will aver, reconfigures the imagination and by virtue the subjectivity of those whose time is determined by this event. The transformation of time in the apocalyptic invasion of God in Christ imparts an apocalyptic subjectivity consonant with the political existence of the believing community.

Entering time, I have argued, God does not leave time unchanged. A change in time is the corollary of the restored reign of God. Filling and fulfilling time, the occurrence of Jesus Christ as the heart of history determines a new pattern of life with a tempo and rhythm consonant purposes of God made known in him. Encountered by the event of Christ and ushered into the reign of God, the believer is made subject to this reign, freed from the hostile powers and reoriented in reconciliation to God. She inhabits a new cosmos, participating in a new history and operating under a new rule. Passing from an old age of death and destruction, she inhabits a new age of life. Moreover, oriented in this way within the faithful service of the believing community, she is activated to make known and make manifest the advent of God's kingdom and dissolution of the old. With Christ as her king, she is made a new subject, no longer conformed to the world. Instead, she is freed to inhabit the restored pattern of life made known in Jesus. In her freedom, in short, she is a new political subject the foundation and fabric of which is the new time of the new age.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> In her discussion of freedom, Hannah Arendt states that "The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action." Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 145. Arendt's discussion of freedom and politics

The notion of subjectivity, however, I realize at first blush can be fuzzy and nebulous. It is by nature a difficult concept to grasp with complete clarity. As I will use it following Ken Surin, however, the term refers to “the repository of the forces and drives that enable human beings to be produced and reproduced as social beings.”<sup>120</sup> It, therefore, refers to the “realm of culture more generally,” as the complex of interrelated and overlapping elements of human existence that shape who we are and how we understand ourselves and our world. The notion of subjectivity indicates the whole of one’s desires, beliefs, experiences, feelings, and most centrally her imagination as she exists in relationship to others and the world as well as within the larger institutions and apparatuses of political and economic life. Subjectivity is the content of the subject, or

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have helped to inform my own views on these topics as she has helped me to understand that freedom is not a category of thought which is why it cannot make an appearance in philosophy—at least, not until the idea of individualized free-will is developed (Augustine’s ambiguous legacy is pivotal here) but it is an aspect of politics. As she continues, “We first become aware of our freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves. Before it became an attribute of thought or a quality of the will, freedom was understood to be the free man’s status, which enabled him to move, to get away from home, to go out into the world and meet other people in word and deed. This freedom clearly was preceded by liberation: in order to be free, man must have liberated himself from the necessities of life. But the status of freedom did not follow automatically upon the act of liberation. Freedom needed, in addition to mere liberation, the company of other men who were in the same state, and it needed a common public space to meet them—a politically organized world, in other words, into which each of the freed men could insert himself by word and deed” (147). What will become more evident in the following chapter is the way in which I see the church, or the believing community, in light of Arendt’s notion of freedom and authority as the common public meeting place where the political subjectivity of these individuals is actualized in new acts of witness and service and the new speech of resurrection, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

<sup>120</sup> Kenneth Surin, *Freedom Not Yet: Liberation and the Next World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 13. While I rely heavily on Surin’s emphasis on the formation of political subjectivity for the possibility of creating an alternative political order, I am not entirely convinced that Deleuze’s nomad politics can really give shape to a communal good. Instead, I acknowledge the real possibility that it might engender an assemblage of terror and oppression. The mob, or the multitude, it seems cannot simply be the reservoir of possibility for liberation but must also be understood as the social potential for destruction, violence, and endless oppression, especially when that mass has been thoroughly purged of statism but has not been trained or captivated by an alternative, unified perspective. For his discussion of Nomad Politics, see pp. 241-61.

the self-conscious agency of a person in reciprocal relation to society and the world. It refers to the configuration of one's dispositions, imagination, intuitions, expectations, etc. in relation to the inexorable process of socialization. The notion of political subjectivity, moreover, stresses the orientation of the subject shaped by traditions, projections, beliefs, and desires in relation to her sense of the aim and the proper order of collective life as well as how she consciously conceives of herself participating in it. It implies the intimate connection between a person's sense of herself and her identity and her sense of the common good, her dignity, her sense of justice, and her place in society. Within the believing community, therefore, it refers to the shape of the consciousness of the believer, her identity, dispositions, desires, etc. within a culture orchestrated and constituted by the lordship of Christ and determined by his time. It refers to the content of her expectations, her sense of justice and the common good, her feelings and experiences, and her commitments and convictions oriented under the authority and coordinated by the tempo and rhythm of the reign of God.<sup>121</sup>

Pointing to the principle and the structure of the peculiar political subjectivity of the believing community at the beginning of his *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*, Yoder comments,

The church precedes the world epistemologically. We know more fully from Jesus Christ and in the context of the confessed faith than we know

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<sup>121</sup> Once again, I have found Arendt's discussion of authority helpful for my own understanding. As she points out, authority is distinct from violence and is not dependent on it; "authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where forces are used, authority itself has failed." But authority is also not based on persuasion as an argument between equals. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 92. It is instead a form of obedience that does not come at the cost of freedom. It is a privileged and respected perspective willingly accepted by those who take it as an authority (105-6). In this way, it closely resembles what MacIntyre refers to as tradition. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 12.

in other ways. The meaning and validity of concepts like “nature” or of “science” are best seen not when looked at alone but in light of the confession of the lordship of Christ. The church precedes the world as well axiologically, in that the lordship of Christ is the center which must guide critical value choices, so that we may be called to subordinate or even to reject those values which contradict Jesus.<sup>122</sup>

In saying this, Yoder, following Karl Barth, argues that the confession of Jesus as Lord determines both the ethical life and the overall knowledge comprising the unique culture of the church. Subjectively, the expectations, experiences, convictions, the sense of the common good, justice, and the proper pattern of social relations are determined in their shape and meaning by the occurrence of Jesus Christ. In other words, the church takes its bearings from the reality, as Yoder remarks “that God broke through the borders of our standard definition of what is human, and gave a new, formative definition in Jesus.”<sup>123</sup> Organized and reproduced as a community, the church exhibits this subjectivity in the socio-political practices of its worship. And because its social existence is by nature an “a posteriori political practice” the content and structure of its culture is apocalyptic.<sup>124</sup>

The form and fabric of this new political subjectivity is founded in the dynamic transformation of time that corresponds to the reign of God made known in Christ. No longer left to the loss and decay of our own time, the believing community in Christ is given a time determined by the content of God’s active presence, stretching and reconfiguring its social imagination.<sup>125</sup> Forming something of a background

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<sup>122</sup> Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 11.

<sup>123</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 99.

<sup>124</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 373.

<sup>125</sup> Similar to Surin’s concept of the political subjectivity is Charles Taylor’s notion of “social imaginaries.” See chapter 4, “Modern Social Imaginaries,” of Charles Taylor’s monumental work, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 159-211; and his *Modern*

understanding for the repertory of collective practices and actions, this apocalyptic political subjectivity gives rise to “a visible socio-political, economic restructuring of relations among the people of God, achieved by divine intervention in the person of Jesus as the one Anointed and endued with the Spirit.”<sup>126</sup> Hence, it is a shared intimation of the wider predicament that makes sense of and provides the larger orientation for the “apocalyptic style,” or “ethic of discipleship” that characterizes the form of life of the believing community.<sup>127</sup> In other words, as the repository of expectations, ideas, convictions, and desires correlated to the dynamic time of the reign of God, it makes sense of and bolsters the “apocalyptic politics” that constitutes the particular way of life of the church.<sup>128</sup> Based upon the fundamental experience that “the ‘beyond’ came first,” an apocalyptic political subjectivity takes its bearings from the event of Jesus Christ and

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*Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) for a full discussion of this concept. Taylor uses this phrase to indicate the range of possibilities available within a specific historical context limited and formed by the material conditions and the conceptual ideals of a community that together nurture its vision of the past, present and future.

<sup>126</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 32.

<sup>127</sup> Yoder, “Ethics and Eschatology,” 125-6.

<sup>128</sup> David Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflections on Nihilism, Tragedy, and Apocalypse* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 210. While I rely heavily upon many of his insights, I feel pressed here to note a distinction between my own narration of “apocalyptic” and that of David Toole. This distinction lies primarily in the degree to which he develops an understanding of apocalyptic that works from Milbank to Yoder, whereas I develop one that works from Barth to Yoder. Thus, whereas Toole, following Milbank is more comfortable speaking of apocalyptic as a “code that allows us to discern the meaning of history” derived from the interruption of history by Christ and the Church, I refrain from making recourse to the terminology of a “code,” preferring more so to speak in terms of an orientation that, as Barth states, “is not referring simply to the specific form of something general, a form which as such is interchangeable.” What I find to be problematic with Milbank’s account, though I do think Toole goes some way in distancing himself from Milbank’s more formal claims, is that the contingent and concrete life of Jesus is elided in preference of a necessary concept of reason. See Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 206-07; Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, 21; John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 392; and John Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 286.

the new possibility for social relations made known in him.<sup>129</sup> Oriented to the purposes of God made known in Jesus, in the common and ultimate good revealed in him, and by the hopeful expectation that God has invaded history and is at work in the world, the church can embark in a politics uniquely its own, as an “art of the impossible.”<sup>130</sup> By nature, therefore, it is a subjectivity derived from the sense that God has invaded human history, is actively present to shape events, does open channels of justice through reconciliation and forgiveness, and ultimately guides the community toward his purposes.

Engendered by an encounter with the person of Christ, the passage to an apocalyptic political subjectivity runs through the truth effect of repentance. However, instead of the this truth effect running from a desire innate to an individual pressing for its actualization in the future, it springs from the truth having become actual in time in Christ, a truth which effects a revolution of the way one knows the world. Repentance, therefore, as the effect of an encounter with the truth of Jesus, is a refashioning (*metanoia*) of the subject according to the content of this truth: the reign of God.<sup>131</sup> As a coming into resonance with the occurrence of Jesus, it is a conforming of the mind to him and the reality of the human subjectivity made possible in him (Rom. 12:2). Repentance names the effect of this conjuncture, where the truth of Jesus encounters someone

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<sup>129</sup> Yoder, “Ethics and Eschatology,” 126.

<sup>130</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 212.

<sup>131</sup> I am intentionally inverting the notion of truth effect outlined by Etienne Balibar in “The Infinite Contradiction,” trans. Jean-Marc Poisson with Jacques Lezra, *Yale French Studies* 88 (1995): 142-64, and appropriated by Surin in *Freedom Not Yet*, 54-59, 221-25. To this extent, my idea, though less romantic I believe, is somewhat closer to the notion of truth-event limned by Alain Badiou in *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*; and *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (New York: Verso, 2001).

resulting in an irreversibly new way of thinking and acting from before.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, in being conformed to the mind of Christ, one's desires are oriented to the truth effect of God's will and purposes in the world, a truth effect actualized as the kingdom at hand in the church and coming in the hope of recreation in the *parousia*.<sup>133</sup> Whereas humanity,

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<sup>132</sup> On the notion of conjuncture, see Balibar, "The Infinite Contradiction," 144.

<sup>133</sup> Essentially, the recreation of the believer's subjectivity I develop here was articulated by Kierkegaard in the concept of "repetition." Within what some may find to be an enigmatic and somewhat perplexing text, Kierkegaard indirectly leads us to the necessity of repentance by having us track the failed attempt of his pseudonym, Constantin Constantius, to enact a life of repetition—that is, of liberation. It seems that Constantin wants to enter repetition through a human movement, thereby obtaining it as an impregnable place of rest for human understanding and the full enjoyment of his desire. He even goes so far as to create experiments to test for repetition, as if it were an object for scientific study. His attempts are simply attempts to harness the motion of life back within the power of human possession through an act of the will and the power of reason. The commencement of Constantin's project augurs its end, for he proceeds in exactly the same manner that all of modern philosophy does. He moves forward as a conquistador under the banner of human thought, obviating the fact that he lands in the exact same place of devastation he exposed underneath the surface of the system. No single passage is more illuminating in regard to the nature of his trespass, than his description of the scene of Berlin on the day he arrives during his experimental journey to "test the possibility and meaning of repetition." Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/ Repetition*, 150. He describes it as such, "I became completely out of tune, or, if you please, precisely in tune with the day, for fate had strangely contrived it so that I arrived in Berlin on the *allgemeine Buszund Bettag* [Universal Day of Penance and Prayer]. Berlin was prostrate. To be sure, they did not throw ashes into one another's eyes with the words: *Memento o homo! quod cinis es et in cinerem revertaris* [Remember, O man! that you are dust and to dust you will return]. But all the same, the whole city lay in a cloud of dust. At first I thought it was a government measure, but later I was convinced that the wind was responsible for this nuisance and without respect to persons followed its whim or its bad habit, for in Berlin at least every other day is Ash Wednesday. But this is of little concern to my project. This discovery had no connection with 'repetition,' for the last time I was in Berlin I had not noticed this phenomenon, presumably because it was winter" (152-53). In adumbration of the outcome of his experiment, he becomes in tune with the remorse of the day. An air of lamentation begins to sweep over him in anticipation of not being able to procure a repetition; even now he begins to see the eventual failure of his project.

Yet in the same instant he misses the meaning and pertinence of the day. He does not see the Day of Repentance as a gift given to him, providing a pathway to repetition. He does not see repentance as the entrance into repetition nor does he see repentance, as paradoxical as it sounds, as the mode of being in which to affirm life. He does not realize that, taking a line from Foucault, "One cannot have access to the truth if one does not change one's mode of being." See Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005), 190. Instead, the fate of his project is evident in his misreading of the disposition of Berlin. He feels the sorrow of failure, his interpretation of the mood of Berlin on Ash Wednesday, but he does not see that the prayer of repentance leads to the hand of God. Constantin evades the wind (and do not miss the Johannine language) that, blowing through the streets of Berlin, blusters these convicts to penance. But he elides repentance, assuming that it has nothing to do with his project. His misstep is that he fails to see that repentance has everything to do with his project. While the untamable river indiscriminately tears everything apart, Constantin fails to conceive that the tears of repentance are, in fact, salvific.



having turned from God and having aligned itself in rebellion under the powers, was set on destruction in an attempt to procure our own desires, through repentance our old way of thinking and acting has been nullified by God, reuniting us to his reign in the truth of Christ (Phil. 2:5).<sup>134</sup> The nullification of our revolt accomplished by God in Jesus Christ is realized for us in repentance, and from there one's life takes up a new trajectory.

The seal of one's unification with the mind and life of Christ is enacted in the initiatory rite of baptism. It is a political act, one in which the believer freely transfers her fealty to God and to the new community oriented to his reign granting her a new identity and a new sense of selfhood within a newly refashioned world.<sup>135</sup> The result is that she is joined with a new people who live in freedom from the political and cultural control of the worldly powers and structures. As Yoder puts it, "Baptism inducts people into a new people, and one of the distinguishing marks of this new people is that all prior given or chosen definitions of identity are transcended."<sup>136</sup> In baptism, a new humanity is constituted, deactivating the allegiances and divisions of the old age (Gal. 3:26-29). As it embodies the new age, the community is characterized by a political subjectivity resonant with the breaking down of divisions accomplished in Christ, who disables the divisions of the old cosmos, and established in the peaceable order of his reign (Eph. 2:14).<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Kroeker, "Living 'As If Not'," 56.

<sup>135</sup> Tracey Mark Stout, *A Fellowship of Baptism: Karl Barth's Ecclesiology in Light of His Understanding of Baptism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 76.

<sup>136</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 367.

<sup>137</sup> A vivid illustration of what I have in mind here was presented to me by Ken Surin while discussing the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. He offers a particularly insightful diagram to help us understand the type of division of the divisions according to force I attempt to name here. In his illustration he notes that typical scientific orders are structured upon the assumption of essence through the categorization of things according to the Organization of Living Things (i.e. kingdom, phylum, class, etc.) In this structure, the world of animate beings is ordered according to the marks of similarities they

Resituating one within a new society, “a new people whose newness and togetherness explicitly relativize prior stratifications and classification,” baptism is the act by which she becomes subject to Christ and joined to his body in the Spirit.<sup>138</sup> The new society is not an erasure of difference, but the recognition of a new way of being with one another that relativizes those differences with a call to reconciliation in a new humanity.<sup>139</sup> An act whose meaning is socio-political by nature, baptism serves to mark the existence of a new community in subjection to the peaceable reign of God, redefining its identity, social relations, and political loyalties.

Finally, given that the political subjectivity of this new community is sealed in the act of baptism, wherein it is joined to the body of Christ, then the cross will determine its mode of engagement. I will say more about the cruciform modality of the church in the

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display. Hence, a race horse and a work horse are categorized under the species Equine, just as a race dog and a domestic dog are organized under the species Canine, simply because they exhibit the possibility of breeding together. This leads us to conclude that they are of the same essence because they proceed from similar parents, can breed, etc. Yet, looking at this taxonomy askance leads us to see that this division could be divided along other lines. We may see that these things can be ordered according to the lines of force for instance, wherein the race horse and the race dog bear the marks of speed, while the work horse and the domestic dog bear the marks of slowness. Through this example we can see that a new taxonomy, say one based on speed, may divide the divisions drawn by the scientific and ontological taxonomies we tend to take for granted. Consequently, this makes explicit the way power tends to hide inside and beneath ontologies, exposing what had until then moved insidiously in covert conquest.

<sup>138</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 33.

<sup>139</sup> In contrast to the argument made by Daniel Boyarin that Paul deploys a strong dualism in order to produce an idea of a universal human essence over and above individual particularities and differences, my claim is that Paul takes differences seriously. In fact, far from attempting to establish some universal human essence by erasing difference, Paul remains completely in touch with the world of particulars. But he does so in a fashion that runs through difference itself. Indeed, Paul’s view of the Spirit as a force makes non-identical repetition possible. Hence, it saves difference while at the same time granting it no essential purchase with respect human identity. For Paul, the person of Christ is repeated in each individual through the power of the Spirit not so as to erase or destroy the marks one had before, but so as to cut deeper and more meaningful ones as we deploy the tactics of the cross using time to bring about its end. See, Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 7.

next chapter, but given that one aspect of subjectivity is a sense of how one should act in relation to others as well as how the larger world works I want to engage it briefly. Consistent with an apocalyptic political subjectivity, one's sense of how to relate to others and what it takes to make things happen is refashioned in the self-sacrificial love of Jesus Christ. As Yoder recognizes, "Jesus was so faithful to the enemy love of God that it cost him all of his effectiveness; he gave up every handle on history."<sup>140</sup> Formed by this, the community functions with an imagination not governed or limited to the possibilities of cause and effect, for efficiency is not the measure of the meaningfulness of its actions. Instead, its political subjectivity "allows one to die to this type of realism, and to hope and work toward the seemingly impossible resurrection within this very reality, trusting that God is able to bring it about."<sup>141</sup> Thus, while it celebrates in its concrete and social life the love and reconciliation, justice and forgiveness that characterize the reign of God made known in Christ, it is not willing to forsake this love as a means of trying to realize this goal. Instead, it maintains a continual "minority" position, following Jesus Christ, who was willing to renounce even what might be considered legitimate ends when those legitimate ends could not be procured through legitimate means.<sup>142</sup> Its sense of how to relate to others and how to reach its ends takes the form of "cross-bearing," trusting that God is at work and will show up to make the impossible possible.<sup>143</sup> Because it is ultimately oriented by hope, an apocalyptic political

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<sup>140</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 233.

<sup>141</sup> Geoffrey Holsclaw, "Subjects Between Death and Resurrection: Badiou, Žižek, and St. Paul," in *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision*, 173.

<sup>142</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 240, 237.

<sup>143</sup> See *Ibid.*, 236-37; and Holsclaw, "Subjects Between Death and Resurrection," 171.

subjectivity characterizes the “new regime” of the church based upon the person of Jesus as “the bearer of a new possibility of human, social, and therefore political relationships.”<sup>144</sup>

### *Conclusion*

An apocalyptic orientation derived from following Jesus, as Yoder remarks,

means that in Jesus we have a clue to which kinds of causation, which kinds of community-building, which kinds of conflict management, go with the grain of the cosmos, of which we know, as Caesar does not, that Jesus is both the Word (the inner logic of things) and the Lord (“sitting at the right hand”). It is not that we begin with a mechanistic universe and then look for cracks and chinks where a little creative freedom might sneak in (for which we would then give God credit): it is that we confess the deterministic world to be enclosed within, smaller than, the sovereignty of the God of the Resurrection and Ascension. ‘He’s got the whole world in his hands’ is a post-ascension testimony. The difference it makes for political behavior is more than merely poetic or motivational.<sup>145</sup>

Oriented within a new cosmos, a new conception of history, and a new experience of time resonant with the sovereign reign of God established in Christ, the believing community is formed as new political creatures. They are the bearers of what I have called an apocalyptic political subjectivity, a community whose imagination is shaped by the possibilities of radical love, mutual provision, reconciliation, and forgiveness according to the new age. As subjects of the reign of God, therefore, the community is also free from the control of the culture and politics, the powers and structures, of the old age. Practicing an apocalyptic politics of non-conformity, they can exhibit a real, distinct

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<sup>144</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 52.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 246-47.

socio-political possibility. A hopeful society oriented by the purpose and will of God made known in Jesus, they can follow his path in expectation that God will show up. To this extent, the believing community can freely go about the patient labor of searching for a new future based upon its conviction that, in Christ, God has made good on his promise to provide it. In this way, the believing community can be a concrete social and political witness, a creative and experimental minority community discovering new possibilities for embodying the gospel of Jesus Christ in service to the world. In doing so, I believe, it also can form the base of congregation-based community organizations working to make societal change.

But if it is upon just such a community that the work of organizing resides, as I hope to show, then what are the practices and processes that constitute the social reality of the believing community? While I have mention baptism as the practice of entry, much more needs to be said about the repertory of collective practices that constitute the social reality of the community. What is the connection between these practices and processes and the faithfulness of the community to the reign of Christ in time? How do they inform real social relations, while recognizing that the church is not perfect? How does the community negotiate conflicts and how does it go about making political judgments? These are the questions I want to take up in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2

### Life in the Order of Redemption:

### The Politics and Mission of the Apocalyptic Community

In the previous chapter I argued that the believing community is constituted by an apocalyptic political subjectivity, one oriented by the invasion of the cosmos by God in Christ and determined by the content of his reign. This subjectivity was formed by a new experience of time resonant with the occurrence of Jesus, endowing it with a new conception of history. Because God as revealed in Jesus is not timeless but is more temporal than humans, following Barth and Yoder I argued that he has time for his creatures and gives them time.<sup>1</sup> Having come into time, the truth of God has become temporal but in doing so has not left time unchanged. While humans were lost to death and destruction in a time of their own making, God in Jesus Christ has healed time, reconciling it to his life and thereby filling it with life under his reign. And it is this new dynamic sense of time consonant with God's reign that reconfigures the believer as a subject: a subject of the new age of God's sovereign dominion. Corresponding to this

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<sup>1</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3.1, 86, and I/2, 45. Jesus, as Barth notes, in his prophetic office, is both the witness and message, the form and content, of the good news for us. As the "*kerygma*," he reveals to us the meaning of human existence in the reconciliation of God to humanity and as the messenger he also makes this good news possible in our lives. He states, "What this Word tells us is the *we* are those who are justified and sanctified in this life, that it was *our* place which was taken by God, the *we* are set in His place, that in this life the kingdom of God has come to *us*, that *our* old life is displaced, removed, destroyed and radically transformed in it, that *our* new and eternal life has begun, that *our* deliverance, conversion and even glorification are accomplished, that *we* are already dead and risen again, that *we* are already citizens of the future world, i.e., of the new and true world to be revealed as the dominion of God in Christ. *We* are those who are eternally loved and elected in Jesus Christ, and called to the grateful realization of their election in time, each in his own time." IV/3.1, 106-07.

apocalyptic political subjectivity, moreover, I suggested that the believing community exhibits a new style, or an apocalyptic politics, presuming that God is active in the world and in their midst and that he will open a future. To this extent, they are a people of radical hope, dedicated to the impossible possibility of what Yoder has called the “social-apocalyptic realism of Jesus’ claims.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, within a cosmos they know to be reconfigured by the relationship of the cross and resurrection, a history redirected and redefined by the purposes of God, and an experience of time determined by the gracious love, forgiveness, provision, and reconciliation of God’s reign, the believing community can embody these qualities in freedom from the powers and structures, the culture and politics, of the world with the patient hope that God will act to make a way.

Furthermore, I proposed that as a culture determined by the transformation of time achieved in the occurrence of Jesus, the rhythms, tempo, and pace of the believing community make it a distinct social institution within the larger society. As a minority community oriented by an apocalyptic political subjectivity, the church is a new power and structure within society capable of embodying and making real change without needing to try to manage or control history. A distinct community, they can be *for* the world. Called as servants of God and subject to his reign in Christ, they are freed in a new agency to make use of the time he gives them to pursue his will and purposes, following the path of obedience made known in the cross of Jesus. In doing so, the church is an embodied witness of and servant to what God is doing in the world, witnessing to what

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<sup>2</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 110.

God has accomplished and made possible in Jesus Christ while anticipating its full consummation.

Yet, the actual social and material reality of the form of life consonant with this new experience of time still needs to be fleshed out. If the apocalyptic orientation limned in the previous chapter comprises a subjectivity that is not abstract, or disembodied, or overly individualized, then I need to describe the social and political practices that make it a concrete, historical organism. Associated with this subjectivity must be real political actions and social processes, learned habits and bodily techniques, and patterns of interrelation, etc. that constitute its real life and make up the collective schema or the communal conditions of knowledge of the believing community. While I will not pretend to infer that the church always acts perfectly, or that the performance of these practices always leads to reconciliation, forgiveness, mutual provision, and love, I do want to show the real, concrete practices and processes that sustain the unique social possibilities correlated to the subjectivity of this people. In other words, I want to consider in this chapter the constellation of practices that constitute the social, historical existence of the community oriented by God's invasion of time in Jesus Christ and through which it lives in concert with the new age of his reign.<sup>3</sup> A community of the new age, the social relations of the church based in these practices and processes can be, as Yoder puts it, "a

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<sup>3</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity: The 1966 South American Lectures*, ed. Paul Martens et al. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 153. As Yoder puts it, "the kingdom of God is a social not an invisible order. But it is not a universal upheaval independent of the will of humans. It is an order of concrete loving and forgiving obedience which people need only to accept, a real possibility of a new order that is announced for today and, allying grace and justice, is open to whomever will accept."



foretaste, a testing ground, and a model of the Spirit's socio-political work."<sup>4</sup> To say this much is to infer that it is to be a sacramental presence and a sacralizing agent in the world, endowed with the authority to perform the temporal social and political tasks necessary to abide within the reign of God and to pursue the fulfillment of its calling to be a reconciling and forgiving community.

Working primarily from John Howard Yoder's notion of the church as a social process, therefore, in this chapter I will describe the constellation of practices that give shape to the socio-political reality of the believing community, placing specific emphasis on the central practice of binding and loosing as the core of the social process that is the sacramental life of the church. Based upon its own unique method for resolving conflicts and the collective authority it exercises in the Office of the Keys to make political judgments, the way of life of the church takes shape in baptism, eating together and sharing resources, listening to one another and offering all the opportunity to speak, and

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<sup>4</sup> John Howard Yoder, *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (1997; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 228. Echoing Yoder's emphasis on the social and political nature of the community as the material presence of the new age introduced by Christ, Stanley Hauerwas, states, "For God saves by making possible the existence of a people who are formed by God's time so that the world can know that we are creatures of a good creator, formed by God's time." See Hauerwas, "The Church as God's New Language" in *Scriptural Authority and Narrative Interpretation*, ed. Garrett Green (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1987), 179. Working within a Barthian register, Thomas Torrance highlights the core issue of time in a somewhat less sociological account, asserting that "while the resurrection is an event that happened once and for all, it remains a continuous live happening with history, and must therefore be interpreted against the patterned stream of history or the secular framework of our space and time. That is why resurrection by its very nature involves apocalypse, both in relation to history and in relation to our understanding of it. By apocalyptic is meant here the way in which we must look at history in the light of God's decisive interventions, interpreting it therefore against the observable patterns of worldly history formed as time flows irreversibly into the past; but in the continuing life of the Church apocalypse means that while we live and work on the plane of ongoing world events as the newspapers and history books write them, we nevertheless live in the power of the resurrection as those who are united to the risen Jesus Christ, and who must not be schematized to the form of the secular world but must be transformed through the renewal of our mind in Christ. We are called constantly to shed the image of the corruptible and put on the image of new creation, for we are caught up in the vectorial movement that runs counter to the regressive flow of corruption and decay and carries us forward into the future to the final and full disclosure of our real being in Christ." Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*, 90.

recognizing each member's particular gifting for the up-building of the community.<sup>5</sup> Engaged in these practices, it embodies a unique ethic resonant with the time of a new age, existing as an alternative society inhabiting a new history and pointed toward a new future. A distinct social schema with its own tempo, rhythm, and choreography, the process manifests the lineaments of the community's apocalyptic political subjectivity, organizing its relations and orchestrating how it makes decisions, exercises authority, and resolves conflict. Furthermore, by underscoring the centrality of binding and loosing, I try to give an account of how the community continues to navigate, with a degree of flexibility and vulnerability, the contingencies of temporal existence in fidelity to the reign of God. Part of what it means to be a social process is that this schema in relation to other conditions of knowledge is not static but dynamic in nature. As a result, its practices will need to be continually scrutinized, reinterpreted, defined, and reconstituted if they are to maintain their material and social vitality. To do so will require a robust practical rationality, or a mode of political judgment, that is also consonant to the reign of God. As I will suggest, it is in this process of practical rationality and political judgment—in connection to the distribution of power in the process of holding a meeting and relying on the skills and gifts of each community member—that the church is able to actualize continually the new social relations established in baptism and the table within changing circumstances and material conditions. Subsequently, this social process also offers real resources for finding creative and experimental ways to go forward without

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<sup>5</sup> The constellation of practices I present here is based upon those given by Yoder in *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Believing Community Before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001).

sacrificing faithfulness and a sense of effective action. As I will argue, it is through binding and loosing that the community enacts the rule of Christ, enabling it to embody the reign of God in witness and to discover new options and new ways of resolving the issues that disfigure society.

In order to illuminate the temporal nature of the community and the social schema that constitute its conditions for knowledge I engage with the work of Pierre Bourdieu. By way of his notion of *habitus*, I will highlight the social and bodily register of subjectivity in the tempos and rhythms of the practices of a community. The logic of practice developed by Bourdieu will help me to clarify how the process and practices of a community form a social schema that establishes the conditions of its knowledge in time so as to allow it to continue to reproduce its way of life within the vicissitudes inherent to temporal existence. I then turn my discussion to the constellation of practices that constitute the way of life of the believing community, elaborating them as social processes that configure and constrain the church's way of life while remaining open to new developments and circumstances. At the center of this process I will argue is the practice of binding and loosing, which provides the community with a unique mode of political judgment and allows it to make political decisions, resolve conflicts, and know how to go forward in reconciliation and forgiveness and new knowledge. Finally, I go on to describe how the social process of the sacramental life of the community interfaces with the world in a mission of witness and service. Because its own internal relations offer a unique alternative pattern of social relations to that of the world, it can attest to a new way of life that is possible free from the powers and structures which order things to

death and destruction. Operating by new rules that free it from the need to take control of society and history, it is also able to pioneer new ways of living, offering pilot programs that attempt experimental solutions to the issues society faces and engage in shrewd tactics instead of violent force to address these problems. In doing so, it can serve the world by working for its transformation from a minoritarian location by engaging at the site of wounds and concerns to offer possibilities for transformation.

My purpose in this chapter is not to try to give an exhaustive ecclesiology, nor to describe each and every activity of the church, but to connect the apocalyptic subjectivity described in the previous chapter with its social manifestation in the worshiping life of the congregation and with the missional presence of the community in society. While I do provide some hints as to what a more complete ecclesiology might look like, any reader seeking to find here such an account will, no doubt, be disappointed. Nevertheless, I do think the insights of this chapter will be helpful for those working more specifically in ecclesiological studies.

Without congregations there can be no congregation-based organizing. Challenging the power of the state and of economic elites, this form of community organizing is dependent upon the power, relations, skills, and convictions implicit in the social processes of those congregations involved in it. And, as a form of engagement in keeping with the worship life of these communities, congregation-based organizing is a faithful and uniquely potent avenue through which these congregations can interface with the larger structures of society and politics. Based upon this constellation of practices, and more specifically, shaped by the central practice of binding and loosing,

congregation-based organizing can be understood as the extension of the new order of the church into the world, both as a challenge to the homogenization of life under the market state and a model to be extrapolated. As I will suggest in the next chapter, because it is based in the practices and processes of the church, especially the practice of binding and loosing, congregation-based organizing provides a faithful and incrementally effective technique of witness and service to the world. To this extent, it can offer a post-secular path of political action that seeks, in a minoritarian way, to sacralize a world lost to nihilism, oppression, exploitation, dispossession, conflict, isolation, and competition.

### *Order, Subjectivity, and Social Process*

Because the church is a social, historical community, it is not a static entity but dynamic. While its experience of time, as I have argued is unique, constituting it as a distinct culture, like any other community its relations and its conditions of knowledge do not remain perfectly fixed. Yet, to be faithful, as I have also suggested, the community must remain resonant with the occurrence of Christ, following an established pattern of social relations fitting with God's reign. How it remains faithful while responding to the changes, vicissitudes, and mutations of temporal existence, therefore, is critical to understanding the peculiar nature of the church as a concrete polity. In order to clarify Yoder's view of the church, I want to refer briefly to the notion of *habitus* as explicated by French anthropologist, sociologist, and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu in *Outline of a*

*Theory of Practice* and *The Logic of Practice*.<sup>6</sup> For I believe that Bourdieu's sense of how a living community sustains its way of life in time through *habitus* will help to highlight what Yoder means when he describes the sacramental practices of the church as social processes.<sup>7</sup> By prefacing Yoder's understanding of the practices of the church with Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, I hope to make clear both how the church remains distinctive as a concrete power in its relation to society and the world and how in doing so it constitutes more than simply another "lifestyle enclave" organized around a simple consumer choice.<sup>8</sup> I will assert that the church as "a new regime" gathered under the new order and rule of Christ and determined by his time is constituted by a constellation of practices informed by the ongoing power of the Spirit that set a new tempo and rhythm for its way of life. This tempo and rhythm establish a pattern and constitute it as a structure, allowing it to persist as a unique culture, or *habitus*, resonant with the truth of God made known in Jesus even as its context, its conditions of knowledge, and its own interrelations change.<sup>9</sup>

The intimate connection for Yoder between Christology and discipleship, as I have argued runs through an apocalyptic subjectivity. But the correspondence between the occurrence of Jesus and the socio-political community of those formed in this apocalyptic subjectivity can only become clear when it is considered in light of what

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<sup>6</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (1977; repr., Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> My reference here is to Yoder's essay, "Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture," in *The Royal Priesthood*, 359-373.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, rev. ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 71-5.

<sup>9</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 32, 52.

Bourdieu calls “the externality at the heart of internality, banality in the illusion of rarity, the common in the pursuit of the unique,” of social arrangements and bodily comportments correlated with and determinate of subjectivity.<sup>10</sup> Because humans are historical, temporal, and social creatures, one’s subjectivity is not configured in a vacuum or at a distance from her social relations, her body, or the world. Instead, subjectivity is a way of designating the peculiar way humans socially inhabit *their* world. As I have already suggested, at the heart of this configuration and its pattern of relations, at the heart of this orientation, is an experience of time that establishes the culture. A shared experience of time, therefore, manifest and inculcated, objectively engaged and socially structured in a constellation of repeated and historical practices that configure the peculiar culture, provide a schema of perception, apperception, conception, and action constituting, what Bourdieu calls, “cultural competence.”<sup>11</sup> And it is only with respect to the socially configured “schemes of perception, appreciation and action which are the precondition of all ‘sensible’ thought and practice, and which, being continually reinforced by actions and discourses produced according to the same schemes,” Bourdieu states, that the temporal and flexibly constant structure of subjectivity can be more completely understood.<sup>12</sup> Hence, to understand the nature of the church as a distinct community comprised of peculiar social processes, Bourdieu’s notion of the social and bodily register of subjectivity as well as his notion of the temporal logic of practice will I think be helpful.

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<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 21. See also, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72.

<sup>11</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 81.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Bourdieu's work focuses on the nexus of time, power, practices, games, and dispositions in social organisms. As part of his larger study, he provides an analysis of practice that takes account of the intimate link between social structure and mental structure with respect to time.<sup>13</sup> Working from Aristotle's understanding of moral character but refracting it through sociological prism, Bourdieu develops a notion of "*habitus*" that seeks "to transcend the opposition between objectivism and subjectivism." As Loïc Wacquant puts it, *habitus* is "the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting *dispositions*, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate ways, which then guide them in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu."<sup>14</sup> The social complex of expectations, customs, and "schemes of perception, thought and action" intrinsic to communal relations, *habitus*, as Bourdieu develops it, has both an enduring quality and yet is at the same time dynamic and flexible.<sup>15</sup> As "systems of durable, transposable dispositions," or, "structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures," *habitus* is the unobservable and living shared commitments, convictions, expectations, intuited knowledge, structured perception, and sense of competent action that exists within any

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Book I of this study is particularly helpful in its critique of what Bourdieu takes to be overly theoretical approaches in anthropology and the social sciences more generally. Instead, he argues for an understanding of *habitus* that attempts to give an account of social practices as living practices within the larger organic life of a community. Against objectivist approaches, whether of the positivist or idealist persuasion, as Bourdieu asserts, "the principle of this construction is the system of structural, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions" (52). That is to say, his understanding of practices articulated within the notion of *habitus* is one that attempts to understand them within their social and temporal conditions where these remain a determining factor for the practices themselves.

<sup>14</sup> Loïc Wacquant, "Habitus," in *International Encyclopedia of Economic Sociology*, ed. Jens Beckert and Milan Zafirovski (London: Routledge, 2006), 318.

<sup>15</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 54.



culture.<sup>16</sup> It is the inherited orchestration of a culture experienced in the recurrent, daily, organizing practices sedimented in the mental dispositions and bodily postures and muscle memories of its members.

Against scientific theories of practice that tend to read them as solidified and dead mechanisms and overly subjectivist accounts that tend to individualize and relativize practices, Bourdieu's theory of practice attempts to take account of the uncertainty of the temporal nature of practices while also recognizing their stability as embodied and inculcated histories.<sup>17</sup> While these practices reproduce the community in the present, providing continuity to the past, they also remain flexible and carry a degree of uncertainty. Such a theory of practice seeks to include "practical relation to the world, the preoccupied, active presence in the world through which the world imposes its presence, with its urgencies, its things to be done and said, things made to be said, which directly govern words and deeds without ever unfolding as a spectacle."<sup>18</sup> In other words, because they operate in time, the participants never have a totalizing view of things or a sense of complete certainty as to how they will work out or where they will lead. To this extent, Bourdieu recognizes the degree to which social groups depend upon acquired rhythms and embodied tempos instead of hard theories or inflexible laws to structure their interactions. The "temporal structure" of practice, "that is, its rhythm, its tempo, and above all its directionality, is constitutive of its meaning," because in this way it bears its

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<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 72.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 82; Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 56.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 52.

history within itself and holds to the truth of that history in the face of the future.<sup>19</sup> Limning practice this way, Bourdieu reminds us that the register of practice is not the static world of observational science, but the dynamic reality of our social relations. Occurring in time, but also shaping their own time by the fact that they give it rhythm and tempo, these living practices reproduce the life of the community.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, its tempo and rhythm distinguishes a particular culture from others politically, a point implied by Bourdieu but made more explicit by Paul Connerton who observes that a regime establishes itself in alternative political rhythms as a way of manifesting the “unequivocal demarcation” of a new social order.<sup>21</sup> First and foremost to the initiation of any political revolution, he continues, is the conscious break from the old order by “[abolishing] the sequence of temporality itself” and severing “the continuity of the temporal order.”<sup>22</sup> As a result, the change in political structure is frequently displayed by the inauguration of a new calendar and by the assimilation of comportment to this new time. Such daily practices, he remarks, are social performances.<sup>23</sup> Through their practice these mundane activities weave the social fabric of the life of the community and embed

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. “In short,” as Bourdieu says, “because it is entirely immersed in the current of time, practice is inseparable from temporality, not only because it is played out in time, but also because it plays strategically with time and especially with tempo.”

<sup>21</sup> See Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 7.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>23</sup> Most specifically for Connerton, a change in dress serves to delineate the new beginning through the daily practice of wearing clothes. He observes that clothes are “‘a kind of general syntax’, a ‘generative grammar’, and a set of ‘semantic oppositions’,” that is, “to read or wear clothes is in a significant respect similar to reading or composing a literary text.” Ibid., 32, 11. In other words, a change in the type of clothes people wear is used to write a script of the beginning of a new order, a new time and a new understanding of existence, a new vision of the world. It is a way of vividly displaying the new social order, one just as powerful as the writing of any revised historical narrative. Clothes, in the form of outward markings, both display and mold people into the new social order by signaling the role they play in the performance of the new politic. Ibid., 33.

a political order deep in its organic movement and in the mental dispositions and body of its members. In line with the insights offered by Bourdieu, then, no understanding of a community and its practices is complete if it does not give an account of their temporal nature, for without this its description will continue to elide their real dynamic existence. Moreover, such a theory will fail to grasp adequately the way in which the truth of that community is embodied and reproduced over time, discounting its political character or rendering its activity largely abstract.

The temporal quality of practices, according to Bourdieu, therefore requires a logic of practice that accounts for the fact that practices occur within time, that they give shape to time, and that they are shaped by a certain experience of time in a history. As a result, in contrast to the totalizing logic of science, the logic of practice is “fuzzy logic” that is no less powerful or constraining but remains flexible and open-ended.<sup>24</sup> Any habitus will have its own unique way of making judgments in accord with this fuzzy logic based on how it distributes power, its sense of honor, what is proper, what is good, and what counts as a dignified action. The schema of this logic, therefore, is best understood with respect to tempos and rhythms manifest in its practices, engrained and instilled into the body and the social relations of the community.

Such a rendering of practices and their logic I think will help us to apprehend better how the constellation of practices integral to the life of the church work to configure its way of life and to manifest its unique experience of time and its peculiar way of making judgments. Understood with respect to *habitus*, the dispositions and

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<sup>24</sup> Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 87.

pattern of social relations corresponding to the apocalyptic style of the community are embodied in tempos and rhythms orchestrated within and by the repetition of these practices. Their nature as social processes is more obvious and helps clarify how the pattern of social relations, postures, and dispositions of the community are continually reproduced in light with the event and person of Jesus. To acknowledge the procedural nature of this constellation of practices is to take account of them as temporal, and to emphasize their rhythm and tempo is to recognize how a certain experience of time gives them structure even as they remain flexible and open-ended. If they are social processes, then considering them as abstract, rote, and formal repetition is not enough, for this only makes them a dead spectacle. A point clarified by Bourdieu and elemental to Yoder's ecclesiology, therefore, is that to be formative practices for the living community these practices must be social by nature and as a result their real meaning for the community must be in the way they cooperate to orchestrate its social relations and configure its dispositions as constraining and yet flexible without being amorphous. Constituting a unique culture as the objective manifestation of its sense of time as *habitus*, these sacred social processes configure the way of life of the community, historically informing its continued reproduction in the present and the structure and manner of its judgments.

### *The Social Process of the New Order*

Bearing Bourdieu's insights in mind, I want to proceed to examine the constellation of practices designated by Yoder as definitive for the life of the believing community (though even as he recognizes there are certainly more than just these five).

Not only will these practices limn the distinctive nature of the social organism of the church, but I also want to pay specific attention to the way these practices function within a collective social process that establishes a certain pattern of existence, allowing it to persist with certain constancy and flexibility. In his essay “Sacrament as Social Process,” Yoder remarks that the function of these practices can be understood in terms of, what he calls, “a sacramental realism.”<sup>25</sup> As normal, everyday activities these practices require no special or philosophical elaboration to explain how they really function, for they are social by nature and in operation. And yet, as the community does them, God does them. They are real social processes within which and through which God works in the community through the Spirit. As social processes peculiar to this community, they constitute it as a distinct social body, a new people with a unique *habitus*, living a public life in and before the world as a distinctly structured power.

For Yoder, however, the social body of the church constituted by its practices and sedimented as *habitus* in the bodily and mental dispositions of its members is anchored in the new humanity presented in Jesus. As the people founded by the truth of God having entered time and whose culture is determined by the qualitative transformation of time accomplished in this event, Christology cannot be divorced from discipleship. That is say, the register of Christian truth is not formal or ideological but social and political, for it is because the church lives

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<sup>25</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 367.

from his life and within the power of his Spirit that the it can enjoy “a new quality of life.”<sup>26</sup> As Yoder states,

When He called His society together Jesus gave its members a new way of life to live. He gave them a new way to deal with offenders – by forgiving them. He gave them a new way to deal with violence – by suffering. He gave them a new way to deal with money – by sharing it. He gave them a new way to deal with problems of leadership – by drawing upon the gift of every member, even the most humble. He gave them a new way to deal with corrupt society – by building a new order, not smashing the old. He gave them a new pattern of relationships between man and woman, between parent and child, between master and slave, in which was made concrete a radical new vision of what it means to be a human person. He gave them a new attitude toward the state and toward the “enemy nation.”<sup>27</sup>

Initiating a real, unique people disposed to and organized by forgiveness, non-violence, mutual provision, and shared leadership situated within a history directed to new creation, this new people can function as a real structure and power in the world, exhibiting a way of life that breaks the rules of the old by beginning to construct something different. It is synchronized and harmonized to a new life in a new pattern of social relations.

Moreover, because this community is to be a real social, historical body, it is not static. It exists in its time and, therefore, must continually reproduce its relations throughout the conflicts, contingencies, and changing situations of temporal existence. Given that *habitus* is the synchronization of actions and dispositions in the ethical life of a culture through its practices, learned habits, conceptions, and inculcated schemas of perception, allowing a community to smoothly and instinctively reproduce itself, the church understood in this way is the community whose culture is synchronized with the

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<sup>26</sup> Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 42, 67.

<sup>27</sup> Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 29. On this aspect of Yoder’s thought in similarity and distinction to Oliver O’Donovan, see Sider, *To See History Doxologically*, 17-56.

reign of God when its practices embody the new humanity made possible in, and prescribed by, Jesus. For Yoder, the social reality of this people who have been given the power to love, forgive, and reconcile is, therefore, marked by peace and justice. But this does not mean that it never encounters conflicts or that it never confronts new situations it does not yet know how to respond to. As Yoder notes, there will be times when the community falls out of sync and when it is not exactly evident to them how to synchronize new situations and new information to its way of life. Therefore, it must rely upon a peaceful way of reharmonizing and realigning itself when things become disjointed and conflicts arise. And this same mode of judgment will be required when it confronts new situations and new challenges it does not yet know whether, or how, to accept or reject. To remain in peace, in other words, it must have a way of making peace, of offering forgiveness and working for reconciliation without strong-arming or imposing a solution through violence.<sup>28</sup> Because in Christ's victory "the split between love and power has been overcome,"<sup>29</sup> however, the community not only can embody a life of peace and justice patterned by and synchronized to God's reign but it also has a peaceful and just way of renewing and modifying itself when things fall out of sync or when encountering new situations and information. And this is exactly the new power it

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<sup>28</sup> In contradistinction to both Kant's vision of a modern universal peace between states presented in his essay on the "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" and Hegel's history of conflict that realizes this possibility over the whole of time, Yoder's political theology speaks "not of *world peace* as a universal hope or a political goal but of the *way of peace* in our present warlike world." Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 47.

<sup>29</sup> John Howard Yoder, "The Burden and Discipline of Evangelical Revisionism," in *Nonviolent America: History through the Eyes of Peace*, ed. Louise Hawkley and James C. Juhnke (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1993), 32.

embodies. As a peaceable and peace-making, as a just and justice-seeking body, it acts as a new and distinct power in the world manifesting the new age of God's reign.

Understood as social process, I want to describe how these practices form the relations and dispositions of the community in a *habitus*. By concentrating on the central practice of binding and loosing, moreover, I want to emphasize the structured but open-ended logic of these practices as well as the unique mode of judgment given to the believing community to renew, readjust, and (re)synchronize its social relations and political decisions to the will and purposes of God. Beginning with baptism and the table, I describe how, according to Yoder, these social processes form the church as an inter-ethnic people whose pattern of economic relations is disposed toward provision and debt forgiveness. Then, I explain how the central process of binding and loosing in connection with the processes of holding a meeting and the recognition of gifts operates as a new mode of political judgment based in a particular kind of power distributed in the community to resolve conflicts, discover new knowledge, and discern ways forward. In both its pattern of relations and its way of resolving issues and making decisions, I will show that the church is formed by a peculiar apocalyptic style resonant with the person of Jesus, following in his rule, and trusting in the power of his Spirit. As sacred processes, however, these practices are no less accessible or publicly visible.

Thus, a decidedly free-church slant permeates Yoder's understanding of these practices, wherein Christ through the Holy Spirit is actively present when "two or three are gathered in [his] name" (Matt. 18:20). Acting with the authority of the Spirit in the exercise of the rule of Christ, or the office of the Keys, the gathered community discerns



what it means to follow Jesus within new conditions and circumstances or in settling disputes. As a method of political judgment and of resolving conflicts, binding and loosing is the way the community together reaches new ethical insights, responds to challenges, tests and confirms its knowledge, and continually renews its way of life. And as a collective practice it depends upon the distribution of power throughout the community, and the practices of listening to each other and employing each person's gifting to address issues and reconstitute itself in resonance with the person of Jesus. While sacramental, these practices are ineluctably social; they are collective acts of the community, not the duties or privileges of professional individuals.

First of all, as the rite of initiation, baptism is the material and social practice of repentance and forgiveness that inducts the entrant into the "new creation" established in Jesus Christ. It is the mark of conversion, a transfer of citizenship to the reconciling community of God. Sociologically, then, baptism is the practice that marks the formation of "a new inter-ethnic social reality," delimiting the community from the world as a united people whose divisions have been overcome. As a result "the primary narrative meaning of baptism is the new society it creates," and whose existence marks the presence of a new age.<sup>30</sup> Those gathered in baptism are a new people, living under and within the time of a new reign, as those who have passed through death with Christ and into his life of reconciliation. Founded upon and sustained by the divine action of God to break down the divisions created by sin, those baptized bear a new political subjectivity

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<sup>30</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 30, 32. As the door of entry into the church, baptism is a concrete and material marker of the believer's passage through death and rebirth into the new age.

oriented by the reign of God and formed as a “new kind of community.” Baptism, therefore, is the practice of realigning ethnic, social, and biological differences, creating unity and kinship where division and animosity had reigned. It is initiation into and the creation of a “new humanity” consonant with the reconciliation achieved in Jesus.<sup>31</sup> In baptism the entrant joins the community, becoming a member of the new people God is gathering, a people ordered away from the selfishness, vengefulness, and competition of the world and to the truth of love, reconciliation, provision, and forgiveness revealed in Christ.

In the practice of baptism, therefore, all prior allegiances are relativized, and all affinities of identity deactivated, because the believer’s new ethnic, national, class, and gender identity (all the temporal markings of other social orders) are continually subjected to the new political distinctiveness of the people of God. The result is not the annihilation of particularity, however, but a new gathering in solidarity, joining them in a new history and a new hope in a shared future.<sup>32</sup> Having become citizens of a new people, the baptized enjoy a certain independence from the structures of the world and their operations, aims, and patterns. But baptism also marks them as a missionary people,

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<sup>31</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 28; and *Royal Priesthood*, 367.

<sup>32</sup> I am deeply indebted here to the argument of Willie Jennings, who delineates the racially malformed social imagination of Western Christianity in connection to colonialism. Recognizing the way in which baptism (or the sacraments in general) have functioned simply as a means of relocating other peoples and cultures within the white configuration of space as private property under capitalism, Jennings suggests that a recovery of these sacraments within a restored imagination must usher in a profound shift in our understanding of space. Only an intimate connection to the body of Christ and to the bodies and spaces of other peoples can begin to recover the true nature of baptism and the formation of a new interethnic people. See Jennings, *The Christian Social Imagination*, 207-88; and “Being Baptized: Race,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 277-89.

joined not by lineage but by the grace of God.<sup>33</sup> To practice baptism, therefore, is to participate in the ongoing process of political formation, negotiating the relational complexities of reconciling divisions between people in a way that attends to the particularity and dignity of these persons. As the process of initiation into the community, baptism offers entrance to the reign of God by synchronizing persons to his will and life in a recreative act of reconciliation that defuses the power of their divisions. It is the process by which the new order, a new people, is instituted in reconciliation.

Second, as a new people practicing a new form of social unity, this community also keeps new economic relations. The pattern of these reconfigured economic relations is the table; the practice or social process where mutual provision replaces competition and disparity in how this people meets its material needs. Because, as Yoder states, “it is part of the definition of the Christian church that Christians are people who eat together,”<sup>34</sup> inherent to this practice is a process of “economic sharing” wherein the “‘breaking of bread’ is believers actually sharing with one another their ordinary day-to-day material substance.”<sup>35</sup> As any society, the church must process the allocation of material goods. But because eating together forms its process of allocation, it syncs it to the will of God that all might find provision, orchestrating it to share and redistribute its resources to meet one another’s needs. That is to say, within the rhythms of their daily life, within the very order of their normal household activities where eating is most basic, the new order of the reign of God can be enacted in the material sharing of the

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<sup>33</sup> Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 8-9, 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 365.

community. The celebration of the table, therefore, sets a rhythm and pattern of social relations that replaces the drive toward disparity, exploitation, and alienation and moves in concert with God's provision, love, and care. Contrary to notions of the Eucharist that remain distanced from the economic relations of the community, Yoder argues that only when the table becomes a process of compassionate distribution and is actually implemented throughout the material life of the community does the church confirm the gospel of Jesus Christ and embody a way of life in resonance with his.<sup>36</sup> Hence, "breaking bread together," for Yoder "is [primarily] an economic act," and it is on this material and ethical level that the transcendence of God is present in the sacrament.<sup>37</sup> To celebrate the table is to share and meet one another's needs, to enact and construct new patterns of economic life determined by the reign of God and shaped by his grace.

One of the most profound elements of the practice of eating together for the economic life of the believing community is its direct relation to the celebration of Jubilee. A legal and calendric rhythm of reordering enshrined in the scriptural constitution of Israel and the implementation of which is proclaimed in Jesus' coming, according to Yoder, the table sets the pattern and process for such jubiliary institution as part of the good news of redemption.<sup>38</sup> Consistent with the way the weekly Sabbath structured the worship life of the people of God, wherein they rested from their normal toils, Jubilee was a Sabbath of Sabbaths, offering a rhythm of cultural rearrangement and restitution. In Jubilee the historical accretion of inequalities that have distorted human

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<sup>36</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 38.

<sup>37</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 33; also see Yoder's *Priestly Kingdom*, where he asseverates, "God's transcendence is moral not only metaphysical" (189).

<sup>38</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 29.

relations, allocating disproportional benefits to the powerful and wealthy while relegating the poor to increasing debt and need, are leveled. It is a practice of comprehensive economic renewal, as it institutes a release of those held captive by debt by cancelling these out and redistributing goods in a way that allows people to start over. According to Yoder, the enactment of Jubilee is part of the gospel, an aspect of the new and immanent political order initiated by God's invasion of time.<sup>39</sup> As the offer of a new beginning, it manifests the reconfiguration of time within social relations, nullifying the debts of the past and opening the future to new possibilities of provision and sharing. Jubilee restores the disjointed economic and social patterns of the old age, opening them up and displacing them with a new order in sync with the reign of God in Christ. The process of the table enables and mandates such a reconfiguration of social and economic relations, making realizable "a periodic revision permitting new beginnings."<sup>40</sup> When instituted it is not the end of economic relations, but their reconfiguration in a new way of meeting needs.<sup>41</sup> An embodiment of the new age, the process of the table informed by Jubilee configures the community to the new humanity introduced in Jesus and away from an imbalanced, dissociative, and abusive pattern of social relations. In the table, forgiveness

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 105. Speaking to the concrete nature of Jesus' message and work, and thus to the concrete nature of the social entity it engendered, Yoder asserts that "the mighty acts of God in Israel's history had been neither the end of history, nor off the scale of human events. We have every reason to assume that the inauguration of the Jubilee was understood by Jesus' hearers with the same concreteness as the Exodus story or the deliverance of Jehosaphat had for them" (86). Furthermore, Yoder recognizes that, as was the case for the Old Testament apocalyptic thinkers who sought to interpret real armies, empires and markets on the basis of God's activity, New Testament writers, as is consistent with Jesus' message, held real social and political expectations as a result of reading their world in light of Christ (245-47).

and provision characterize the sacred process of mutual sharing through which the community meets its needs.

If the practice of baptism perpetually marks the institution of the new interethnic, unified, and socially reconciled people of God and the practice of eating together establishes a pattern and tempo for the community's economic relations in sync with the reign of God, then the process of binding and loosing accompanied by following the proper protocols for meetings and by recognizing and relying on each member's particular gifts provides the community with a way of making decisions, facing challenges, and encountering new information when it has fallen out of sync or does not know how to move forward in resonance with the life of Jesus. That is to say, through the ongoing process of conflict resolution and forgiveness and of collective moral discernment, when supported by the practices of "the fullness of Christ" and "the rule of Paul,"<sup>42</sup> the community has a divinely mandated way of renewing the "peculiar pattern of presence," or the "social-apocalyptic realism," of its *habitus*.<sup>43</sup> As the collective practice of reconciliation and forgiveness, of practical discernment and political judgment, and of the exercise of a broadly distributed power, these processes are the means by which the community can realign, renew, or modify its standards.<sup>44</sup> By actively processing the

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<sup>42</sup> These are the technical terms used by Yoder in *Body Politics* to describe 1). the recognition of divine gifts and skills given to each member of the community for its upbuilding, and 2). the peculiar way the congregation is to hold a meeting such that each person is given the opportunity to speak. See chapter 4, "The Fullness of Christ" (47-60), and chapter 5, "The Rule of Paul" (61-70). While both of these sacramental practices are larger than I am able to outline here, my main interest is to display the intimate connection between them and the practice of binding and loosing. In fact, none of these practices can be disconnected from the others, and as I will continue to argue, this is primarily because all of them are necessary elements of the social process that constitutes the temporal life of the community.

<sup>43</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 110.

<sup>44</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 328.

realities of everyday life in a sacred manner the church knows how to be church and how to face the future in hope, because in this practical activity the church discovers the power of the Spirit to function, according to Yoder, as real “a decision-making body.”<sup>45</sup>

If the believing community is to persist as a living social body, then it must be able to resolve the issues that arise within its own polity and as a result of changes in its conditions. That the practice of breaking bread together, the celebration of the Eucharist, could become and does become corrupted is already evident in I Corinthians 11, where, as can be seen from Paul’s admonishment, the distortions of the church’s economic life have perverted the practice of their shared meal. Similarly, that the social substance of baptism was disputed within the early church is clearly evidenced by Paul’s letter to the Galatians as well as the narrative of the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15. In the church, just as in any human polity, conflicts and problems arise, situations change, and new circumstances present new challenges. This much is evident from the apostolic witness itself. Hence, in order to incarnate consistently the reconciliation, justice, provision, forgiveness, and love of God, the community must know *how* to negotiate its own failures, to resolve the conflicts that arise in its midst, and to discern where it has failed to be synchronized to the kingdom of God and will, thus, need to make changes in order to remain faithful to its commitments.<sup>46</sup> As Yoder observes, the biblical view and the early church are not unfamiliar with the fundamental “anthropological insight” that

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<sup>45</sup> Yoder, *For the Nations*, 187.

<sup>46</sup> This practice becomes even more powerful when one considers the prevalence of religious incongruence documented in the field of the social scientific study of religion. Yet, as Mark Chaves has argued, many people, and probably many more theologians, still fall prey to the “fallacy of religious congruence.” Mark Chaves, “SSSR Presidential Address, Rain Dances in the Dry Season: Overcoming the Religious Congruence Fallacy,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 49:1 (2010): 1-14.

conflict is a part of human life, even life in the order of redemption. But neither are they bereft of a means to deal with these issues. For, while “to be human is to have differences; to be human wholesomely is to process these differences, not by building up conflicting power claims but by reconciling dialogue.”<sup>47</sup> In short, to persist as the community it is called to be, the church must continually evaluate its practices and address the issues and problems that arise in its midst in an open and personal way that is available to all of its members. Binding and loosing is the social process within which it deals with these issues and discerns how to follow in the Spirit. It is the exercise of the rule of Christ,<sup>48</sup> or the office of the Keys, through which the Spirit empowers the community procedurally to discern, to act, and to reconfigure its standards where necessary.

Often mistaken for crude and hierarchically disfigured executions of community discipline or excommunication, binding and loosing must be understood instead as a

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<sup>47</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 8.

<sup>48</sup> The rule of Christ was understood by the Radical Reformers as a means of communal organization and discipline that cannot be divorced from a Christology stressing the lordship, or kingly office, of Christ. As Yoder argues in *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, “*The Rule of Christ* was a technical term referring to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18:15-20: If believers commit an offense, talk to them about it. The Swiss Brethren made this not simply a good piece of advice in pastoral relationships or personal reconciliation but a definition of the church. These verses in Matthew 18 are the only place in the words of Jesus where the word *church* is used, with the admonition to his disciples to do this. For the Zurich radicals, then, the way to reform the church is by observing the rule of Christ, not by getting city council votes or episcopal rulings. If something is wrong with the church, believers should talk about it. The way to reform a church is to talk to one another, to deal with offenses; the result will be forgiveness and reconciliation.” It was the alternative to a reform by coercion, the alternative to the sword, as Yoder continues, “so the *rule of Christ* should not be equated with *ban*. The noncoercive process of admonition and reconciliation is the way to handle conflict; it is the alternative to the sword. The reason we do not use the sword is that we have this other instrument to use in the Christian community.” John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, ed. Theodore J. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 170, 173.



“pastoral process” of conflict resolution aimed toward forgiveness and reconciliation.<sup>49</sup> Established by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-20, wherein he instructs the “church” on how to deal with offenses committed against one another, binding and loosing is, first, a method for seeking reconciliation through accountability and forgiveness. As such, it is an order or procedure for the exercise of the power of forgiveness and reconciliation that allows the community to abide in the grace, truthfulness, and justice of Christ’s rule. Just as any short-circuit of the procedures of the law imply an abnegation of the rule of the law, so also to remain in the order of God’s reign, the community will have to follow Christ’s rule, embodying the methodical pursuit of forgiveness and reconciliation when disagreements, even small ones, arise. And it will need to continue to engage in this practice in order to harmonize and synchronize its collective life to the occurrence of Jesus. As Yoder puts it, “The point of this instruction on the part of our Lord was not simply that his disciples would need ways of resolving social problems. It is rather that, if the church is to preach a gospel of forgiveness at all, this must first be made real in specific times and places in the relations between particular persons. Forgiveness must be

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<sup>49</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 3. Outlining this process, Yoder notes four criteria for it. First he notes that the initiative is personal and not a clergy function, laying responsibility on each and every community member to engage in this rule. Second, he observes that the intention of the one confronting the offending member is restorative and not punitive. Third, this process does not distinguish between major and minor offences. As Yoder notes, “Any offense is forgivable, but none is trivial.” Fourth, the aim of this process is not to protect the reputation of the church or to teach onlookers the seriousness of sin, but only to serve the offender’s own well-being by restoring him to the community. Its entire shape is forgiveness and reconciliation (2-3). Parenthetically, it is worth mentioning here that, for all his intellectual muscle, Aquinas remains essentially unhelpful when it comes to rehabilitating the Office of the Keys. Within the *Summa* the office of the Keys is lodged within the sacrament of penance, and as a result, is completely hedged off from the corporate activity of the community, becoming a professionalized activity exercised by those who administer the grace of God to individuals. What is clear is that it has no function within the daily life of the community. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III. Supplement. Q. 17ff.

made flesh among people where it is needed.”<sup>50</sup> Negotiating the real conflicts that arise within the community, the process of binding and loosing, or the rule of Christ, provides a way to resolve these conflicts not as a general formula of the past or by instituting a top-down ruling, but by inviting the members within the community in conflict with one another to work toward forgiveness and reconciliation around a specific, particular wound. Making use of this rule to discover solutions, as Yoder closely following Matthew 18:19-20 tells us, the community acts in the power of the Spirit, who harmonizes them to make shared and authoritative judgments.<sup>51</sup>

As outlined in Matthew 18, the “due process” of binding and loosing begins with a “concrete offense,” that is, a real conflict or wrong experienced within the community.<sup>52</sup> Addressing the issue, as they are instructed to do by Jesus, begins with a face to face meeting (v.15). In accord with the relational pattern of the community, the offended individual (or even someone with knowledge of an offense) is emboldened to initiate “a procedure of personal conversation, initially confidential” aimed at holding the offender accountable “with the intent of reconciliation” not punishment.<sup>53</sup> From the start, the process is structured to give voice to the wronged and to establish a precedent in the community for listening to one another as the means of resyncing them. Should this one to one meeting fail, the procedure calls for the enlistment of two or three others to go with the offended person to the offender as a means of amplifying the entreaty to listen and be reconciled. Moreover, by taking a personal interest in the healing of this conflict,

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<sup>50</sup> Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 14.

<sup>51</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 362.

<sup>52</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 2, 12.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

these other members are to mediate and arbitrate in the hopes of reaching a resolution. Finally, Jesus instructs his disciples that “if the [offending] member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church” (v.17), where the entire resources of the community are available and deployed to reach a solution. The aim here is not to protect the community’s reputation or to teach the seriousness of sin, but solely to repair relations, to restore wholeness, and to offer forgiveness.<sup>54</sup> Only once this entire process has been completed and the offender still refuses to listen, does the community mark his irreconcilability with separation while continuing to hold out the possibility of forgiveness and never losing the hope of future reunion. For by refusing personal and reconciling conversation, the offender who chooses to remain stubborn and unwilling to engage or to listen and receive counsel has abandoned his baptismal vow and dissociated himself. Encountering conflicts in this process, the community faces them “in light of the gospel,” seeking “redemptive dialogue” and extending forgiveness with the hope of reconciliation, healing and restoring relationships, and at times modifying hurtful structures.<sup>55</sup> Doing so instills and requires a disposition of generosity, vulnerability, and open receptivity to the differences, concerns, and wounds of others.

In order to properly engage in such a process, however, the community will need intimately related processes that consolidate power differently by including each member. Binding and loosing does not function on its own disconnected from the guidance provided in the canon for how the power of the Spirit operates in the church, by

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 13, 11.

allowing all to speak and recognizing each member's gifts. Hence, it must be accompanied by the practices of the rule of Paul and the fullness of Christ. The rule of Paul, according to Yoder, offers the community directives for "holding a meeting in the power of the Spirit" by opening space in a "body process" for everyone to speak and making room for dialogue and listening.<sup>56</sup> Describing this process, Yoder stresses the fact that "Paul tells his readers that everyone who has something to say, something given by the Spirit to him or her to say, can have the floor."<sup>57</sup> The effect of the practice is that the gathered meetings (and the doing of the community's politics) are more open to the voice and direction of the Spirit and less prone to being taken hostage by the personal agenda or power play of one or two individuals, especially those occupying privileged positions. The procedure infuses the community with a decentralized order and authority. Anyone, including the less privileged or uncharismatic, is given time to speak. As a result, the rule encourages and creates time for conversation, a built-in practice that gives voice to each one in the process of making decisions, offering forgiveness, interpreting the gospel, recognizing the will of God, responding to challenges, and searching for resolutions. Such dialogical reasoning, or as Yoder calls it, the "hermeneutics of peoplehood,"<sup>58</sup> instituted in the rule of Paul is a critical structural component of the community's ability to bind and loose. By holding its meetings in this manner the community recognizes that its power is not one that can be concentrated in or coopted by the few, because the Spirit

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<sup>56</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 363.

<sup>57</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 61.

<sup>58</sup> Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 26. For a more expansive discussion of Yoder's notion of the "hermeneutics of peoplehood" (15-45).

speaks through all members. Each member will need to be heard if they are to let the Spirit guide them.

Furthermore, in order for the community to exercise its power, to move in the Spirit, it will need also to rely on the unique skills and divine gifts given to each of its members for the up-building of the congregation. It will need to practice the fullness of Christ, a process Yoder explains as employing the unique and diverse gifts of those in the congregation in order to locate the skills necessary for renewing and sustaining its life and resolving its issues.<sup>59</sup> Because it is not to be reliant solely on one individual or professional, the community will look to new leaders who possess the peculiar gifts to meet its needs and to address the issues it faces. Recognizing from Scripture that each member has been equipped by the Holy Spirit for the up-building of the body, each plays an “empowering role” within the community.<sup>60</sup> The “portion of grace”<sup>61</sup> granted to each member provides her with specific tools to help the community sustain its life, to solve problems, to offer counsel and provide insight, and to make reconciliation, forgiveness and association possible. Thus, relying on collective participation, consensus, and making use of the gifts of new leaders equipped to address these situations, the community exercises an authority not derived from hierarchy or office but through the presence of

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>60</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 362-63. To be clear, Yoder is not arguing here that these gifts are innate to any gathering of people. They are the gifts of the Spirit to the church and they cannot be divorced from their pneumatological origin. As he notes, because “the distribution of gifts [through the Spirit] is a part of the victory of Christ...this complementarity of many gifts is not described [by Paul] as living out a code already present in the nature of things, such as the way our genes bear a pattern for our physical body to grow into. Paul rather calls it ‘making your call sure,’ consolidating the gift just received from the ascending Lord and living up to a direction we have just been shown.” *Body Politics*, 48-49.

<sup>61</sup> Yoder, *For the Nations*, 45.

the Spirit in the gathered and fully functioning body.<sup>62</sup> To exercise the Keys, that is, to bind and loose the entire resources of the community are needed, for this process can only function to unlock the divisions of conflict, the damage of wounds, the barriers of new challenges, and the doors to a new future if the full extent of Christ's Spirit is recognized by the community.

When the church makes use of these procedures and discovers the power of God in them for addressing disagreements and offenses, therefore, it does not have to understand conflict in a purely negative way, as if it were the mark of inevitable degeneration characteristic of all other temporal orders.<sup>63</sup> Instead, the church can view conflict as "socially useful" because it offers the community an opportunity to "attend to new data from new perspectives."<sup>64</sup> As a result it need not fear the reality that it will at times become disjointed or fall out of sync, because God has given it a method for reharmonizing itself and discovering new moral insights that bring it more in step with him. Addressing these issues, therefore, another function of binding and loosing becomes evident: its function as a means of communal moral discernment. As it faces these issues, concerns, and wounds and does not shy away from them, the process also works as a

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 185. Describing the unique arrangement that arises within such a community where each person is empowered with a specific gift that it needs, Yoder discovers in Paul a vision for the community based on the belief that "in the midst of a fallen world the grace of God has apportioned to every one, without merit, a renewed potential for dignity in complementarity." Not to be misunderstood as an "anti-structural" constitution of the community, however, Yoder instead sees it as one that is "analogous to the human organism." *Body Politics*, 55.

<sup>63</sup> In book VIII of the *Republic*, Plato recounts Socrates' discussion with Glaucon of the various forms of the city-state. One of the unavoidable difficulties faced by every politic, as Socrates notes, is the inevitability of decay and degeneration. See Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube and rev. C.D.C. Reeve in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 1158ff.

<sup>64</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 8.

method of practical rationality, allowing the community to make decisions in new situations through the power of the Spirit. Indeed, this is what it means “to bind” and “to loose” with respect to conclusions reached by the community in solving its problems. As Yoder remarks, “To ‘bind’ in rabbinic usage is to respond to a question of ethical discernment” or to obligate, “[t]o ‘loose’ is to free from obligation.”<sup>65</sup> Each are ethical directives determined within and by the community regarding how it is to respond to real disagreements and concrete issues that arise in its life together. It is a concrete and practical method for ordinary members to learn new insights and to make real decisions about how to rectify offenses and to modify its structures, its patterns, and rhythms.

But, as indicated by Christ’s promise to be present in this activity (Matt 18: 18-20), it is not merely human in nature. Though it is truly a concrete and temporal activity, Scripture also informs us, as Yoder notes, that “God would at the same time be acting ‘in, with, and under’ that human activity.”<sup>66</sup> Through the process of binding and loosing, therefore, the community continues to act in the power of God and to deploy a practical rationality that guides it accordingly. Consequently, as an exercise of unique judgment and authority, “It gives more authority to the church than does Rome, trusts more to the Holy Spirit than does Pentecostalism, has more respect for the individual than humanism, makes moral standards more binding than puritanism, is more open to the given situation

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 1. Echoing Yoder’s understanding of the sacramental agency enacted within this process and these practices, Douglas Harink, commenting on Paul’s view, notes, “through the gift of the Spirit, God recreates human moral agency (and reason itself) in the messianic community.” See Harink, “Introduction,” in *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision*, 4.

than the ‘new morality.’”<sup>67</sup> For Yoder, this process constitutes the unique “mode of truth-finding and community building” that is the inalienable task of the gospel community if it is to be true to its calling. For, in doing so, it discovers how to move forward and how to engage new situations in obedience, trusting that as it encounters new contexts God’s Spirit will lead it along.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, when it makes judgments in this way the community can be confident that its decisions are in step with the will of God, manifesting the truth of his love and gracious provision and following, expectantly, in the history he provides for them even as it knows it will need to continue to seek such guidance.

With binding and loosing at the heart of its social processes, the church is able to renew, evaluate, (re)synchronize, and reconfigure its structuring practices, endowing them with a way to address conflicts and to navigate new data. Engaging in this process, the community can continue to bring its actions, relations, and practices in concert with the reign of God by “trusting the Spirit’s leading in contextual application.”<sup>69</sup> Binding and loosing is, therefore, the sacred process given to the community for resolving conflicts and making judgments that continually synchronizes its ethics to the will of God and thereby sustains its unique culture. As Yoder states, “It is too little to see in this process an instrument of pastoral care for the individual, though it is that. It is at the same

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<sup>67</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 325. Yoder’s notion of sacrament as process I think goes farther in its ability to counter the power of consumerism than does the sacrament as conceived by Vincent Miller. While Miller recognizes that “sacramentality is an interesting example of a religious resource for countering consumer culture, because it challenges consumer culture not by critiquing consumption but by challenging the abstracting dynamisms of commodification itself,” he never quite gets around to recognizing one of the most basic insights of Marx—that capital is not a thing but a process. Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 189. Hence, only a new process of production, reproduction, and decision can achieve emancipation from its configuration of real, social relations.

<sup>68</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 13.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.



time the mode whereby the community's standards are clarified and, if need be, modified."<sup>70</sup> Thus, binding and loosing is an activity the church cannot live without because through it the community continually forms, reforms, and reconstitutes its ethic as a living tradition.<sup>71</sup> In short, for Yoder, a central "[p]art of what it means to be the believers church is to believe that there are answers that we don't have yet," and this implies that the community will have to discern new answers and to test them against the "Jesulogical" shape of God's work, critically examining its patterns and structures collectively to see if they really coincide and resonate with the "meaning of Jesus."<sup>72</sup> Together, the church must discern how to remain faithful to Christ in time with all of its contingencies, changing conditions, urgencies, and disturbances. Binding and loosing, along with decentralized dialogue and decision making and relying on the divine enablements of those in the community, presents the way for them to abide in a way of life that resonates with the person of Jesus in a visible and accessible way that confirms

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 2, 5. Yoder reiterates the innovative character of this activity as a communal form of discernment, stating, "Where it had been assumed that there is no third way between puritanical legalism and nondirective counseling, [binding and loosing] can unite substantial moral concern with redemptive confidential admonition" (11).

<sup>71</sup> No one has more adamantly argued for the recovery of traditions of inquiry than Alasdair MacIntyre, whose critique of modern liberalism argues that in its attempt to formulate a notion of the individual free from any tradition, the enlightenment philosophy ultimately created the conditions for moral cacophony and decay. By discarding the role of tradition for providing coherency and significance to a collective form of life, modern philosophy, so MacIntyre has suggested, has only resulted in perforce fracture, division, and the unintelligibility of emotivism across modern life. By contrast, what modern communities are desperate to recover are deeper traditions. As defined by MacIntyre, "A tradition of enquiry is more than a coherent movement of thought. It is such a movement in the course of which those engaging in that movement become aware of it and of its direction and in self-aware fashion attempt to engage in its debates and to carry its enquiries forward." Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 326. In other words, a tradition is a living mode of rationality whose adherents agree upon a common good and abide by common criteria of justification as they attempt to address questions that arise even as the stock of conclusions and answers is continually enriched and broadened by these adherents as they seek to answer these questions.

<sup>72</sup> Yoder, *For the Nations*, 161, 241.

the gospel within their own context. While structured, it remains more precarious and flexible, trusting in hope to the Spirit with the recognition that “the only way to see how this will work will be to see how it will work.”<sup>73</sup>

In faith, the church follows the path of Jesus, discovering in obedience to his rule the hope of the direction of his history repeated in theirs. As Yoder puts it elsewhere,

The path of obedience *is found in the community*. Jesus’ authorization ‘to bind and loose,’ as we saw, means that it is in the functioning of fraternal admonition and common search that the way of obedience is discovered... [And this path] is illumined by a *common hope*.<sup>74</sup>

The process of binding and loosing allows the community to continually institute and resync its pattern of social relations in correspondence to the event of Jesus and marked by reconciliation, forgiveness, peace, hope, and love. Acting in the power of the Spirit, Christ’s rule procedurally allows the body to make decisions, face challenges and conflicts, learn new insights, and reevaluate its practices in a mode of judgment consonant with path of humanity under the reign of God.<sup>75</sup> It does this as it acts in time and makes decisions, solves problems, and addresses wounds according to the method of practical logic consonant with the rule of Christ and exercised in the Keys. A process of

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<sup>73</sup> Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 40, 45.

<sup>74</sup> Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 43.

<sup>75</sup> While I agree with Kerr’s notion that “the resurrection is an event that not only throws us backwards onto the cross as the key to the truth of history but also points us forward in such a way as to drive us deeper into the contingencies and pluralities of ongoing history in order to find there our own mode of participation in the apocalyptic historicity of the resurrected crucified one, through the ‘more’ that the Spirit is doing in relation to those contingent realities,” where he is elusive and remains incorrect in his reading of Yoder is exactly the extent to which the “us” and “our” of his sentence clouds over an underlying individualism that still haunts his entire project. Kerr, *Apocalyptic*, 154. In giving no attention to the process that not only constitutes this “us” but also directs this community in its readings of the contingencies and pluralities of history to assess the “more” that the Spirit is doing, Kerr seemingly dematerializes the church and thus leaves it, as I think Yoder would esteem, ultimately too Docetic in its constitution, and therefore not nearly as precarious as Yoder’s vision of the church. What is key here is the degree to which Kerr drastically underestimates the power given over to the process of binding and loosing in the community according to Yoder’s read of Matthew.

judgment determined by a tempo and rhythm commensurate with the reign of God, in it the community abides apocalyptically, ordering its life on God's promise to show up and to make his will known. Binding and loosing is the way the community is called to inhabit the new age by offering it a way to listen to the Spirit, resolve conflicts, modify its relations when necessary, assess new information, and live in fidelity to God's reign in a historic manner.<sup>76</sup>

Through the process of binding and loosing the church determines what it means to be obedient to the way of Christ and his time—that is, in new situations and around specific issues. In this process the community establishes a new tempo and rhythm, giving shape to a new structure and pattern of life in a new order. Abiding in the rule of Christ, the church reproduces its unique culture and carves out a real socio-political alternative, organizing its material life through a constellation of practices the vitality of which is continually rediscovered in the social process of the exercise of the Rule of Christ. As a mode of collective practical rationality, judgment, and conflict resolution, it continually synchronizes the concrete life of the community to the rhythm and tempo of God's reign, providing it with a procedure that reinvigorates it anew such that it need not necessarily fall into degeneration. Because the church in Christ knows that the doing of every-day activity is itself sacred—indeed, it is the instance where faith is enacted, where

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<sup>76</sup> Sider, *To See History Doxologically*, 180ff. Sider, while not specifically mentioning binding and loosing, does point to the practice of the “fullness of Christ” and the “rule of Paul,” correlating them to the active discernment of the community. However, I am sure he would agree with my claim that these practices are intimately interwoven with the ecclesial process of binding and loosing. Similarly, as Dan Barber, commenting on the implications of Yoder's understanding of the Incarnation, puts it: “the claim that Jesus is God implies a coinherence between God and the world, but what this coinherence produces is history—or at least, a historical process in which human creativity is not *a priori* severed from the creative power of God.” Barber, “Production,” 81.

the reign of God matters, and where the impact of the kingdom upon the world is realized—there is a sacred process for settling every-day matters, disputes, and conflicts and for making every-day judgments and decisions. It, thus, gives shape to a new form of life within the community, a form of life commensurate to the truth of God revealed in history and directed on a path of forgiveness and reconciliation under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. The life of the church embodied in this social process, therefore, allows it dynamically to exhibit a social and political existence formed by love, knowing a future for it is possible because God has faithfully promised to show up and to guide it forward.

*Witness: The New Order Before the Watching World*

As should be evident from what I have said thus far, the social organism of the believing community is ordered and arranged according to a constellation of practices the tempo of which is rooted in the transformation of time in Christ and continually synchronized by the social process of conflict resolution and moral discernment embodied in the activity of binding and loosing. It is a political body, a characteristic of Yoder's view of the church popularized in Stanley Hauerwas's claim that "The church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic."<sup>77</sup> To construe the church as an apolitical entity, according to Yoder, is to abstract or retreat from its original and full design. The believing community, as it exists and as it manifests real new social relations,

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<sup>77</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 99.

is the visible and historical effect of God's invasion of the cosmos, a political reality engendered by the powerful truth of God having entered time. They are a people constituted in the transformation of time, the redirection of history, and the reconfiguration of the cosmos to the reign of God accomplished in this event. And their way of life is shaped by an apocalyptic disposition, through the tempo of its practices and mental structures, in resonance to the occurrence of Jesus.

Yet, while it is a distinct community, the church is not withdrawn or isolated from the world. It lives instead in the world, constantly interfacing and engaging with it. But the question of how it does so still remains. I will seek to answer this question in the final two sections of this chapter, arguing that the political reality of the church interfaces with the world in two primary ways: witness and service, both of which are derived from the substance of its social life and give shape to its mission. Having outlined the practical rationality, or political judgment, of the community, through which it continues to order and reproduce its peculiar pattern of social relations, in this section I will sketch the function of this process as witness to the world before limning how it informs the church's service to the world in the final part of this chapter. As will become apparent in both sections, the apocalyptic style of the church manifest in the process of binding and loosing determines the external posture of the community, giving rise to its missional activities first in witness and then in service and enemy love.

Echoing Barth's understanding of vocation as the Christian's call to participate in the prophetic work of Christ through witness as well as his emphasis on the power of the

Holy Spirit to equip her for this task,<sup>78</sup> Yoder, as I have described above, intertwines the message of the gospel communicated in witness with the very social organism of the community. He agrees with Barth in thinking that the community exists in its time to be a witness.<sup>79</sup> Where Yoder goes beyond Barth, however, is in his recognition that the very existence of such a community is already a public witness because it is the concrete manifestation of the gospel in the world. Because they are not hidden or opaque rituals but completely public and concrete, the practices and processes that structure the social relations of the church are in their very performance available to outsiders as a testimony of the new order. As Yoder puts it, “It is not that first we set about being a proper church and then in a later move go about deciding to care prophetically for the rest of the world. To participate in the transforming process of becoming the faith community *is itself* to speak the prophetic word, *is itself* the beginning of the transformation of the cosmos.”<sup>80</sup> That is to say, by just being the church, by enacting forgiveness, reconciliation, repentance, engaging in redemptive dialogue, offering gracious provision, celebrating Jubilee, listening, and exercising love, the community makes known the gospel of Jesus

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<sup>78</sup> See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3.2, §71. Furthermore, Barth goes on to note at the beginning of §72 that the completion of this vocation (*klysis*) is achieved by the integration of the individual believer into the community of the called (*ekklysia*). As he states, “vocation to be a Christian means vocation or calling into Christendom of the Church, i.e., into the living community of the living Lord Jesus Christ” (681).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, §72.

<sup>80</sup> Yoder, *For the Nations*, 27-28. Reiterating this point elsewhere, Yoder states that “the work of God is the calling of a people...the church is then not simply the bearer of a message of reconciliation, in the way a newspaper or a telephone company can bear any message with which it is entrusted. Nor is the church simply the result of a message, as an alumni association is the product of a school or the crowd in a theater is the product of the reputation of the film. That men and women are called together to a new social wholeness is itself the work of God, which gives meaning to history, from which both personal conversion (whereby individuals are called into this meaning) and missionary instrumentalities are derived.” Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 74.

Christ to the world, both testifying to the possibility of a new humanity and offering the opportunity to recognize its own denial of God's reign.

The first, and fairly obvious, way in which the church interfaces with the world in witness, therefore, is that it makes its life accessible to all, conducting its life not in private but in public view. The social practices and processes that make up its worship, while enacted for the benefit of those within the community, are also an open testimony to the world that makes known the new possibility for the world opened up by Christ. As I have already stated, these activities are lay in nature and, therefore, they are intrinsically observable, available, and "evangelical." When enacted and confirmed they are the message. Those on the outside can witness the truth of the gospel at work when they observe how it deals with conflicts, cares for one another, reconciles divisions, forgives, listens to one another, receives and acknowledges each other's gifts, and discerns collectively. These social processes provide the world with a concrete instance of a way of relating to one another, recognizing the dignity of each other, and offering forgiveness and reconciliation that it did not already know and had not considered possible, a fact implicit in the church's own *a posteriori* existence. By engaging in this new social process, "[the church] tells the world what is the world's own calling and destiny, not by announcing either a utopian or a realistic goal to be imposed on the whole of society, but by pioneering a paradigmatic demonstration of both the power and the practices that define the shape of restored humanity."<sup>81</sup> As it does so, it both makes known to the world

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<sup>81</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 373.

that it is the world and exhibits and testifies, in its distinctiveness, to the real future of the new world that is on its way.

Another correlated aspect of the witness of the believing community is that it enjoys a certain independence from the social and political orders of the world and, therefore, can offer a real alternative. Conducting its normal operations, it exhibits a concrete distinction “between the politics of [humanity] in [its] rebelliousness and the politics of [humanity] under the teaching and empowerment of God’s Spirit.”<sup>82</sup> Because it springs from the new possibility opened up by work of God in Christ, and because it lives under his reign and relies on his power in the exercise of the Keys, it is free to live a differently configured life within the structures of society. In contrast to the order of social relations under the sovereignty of the powers, whose reign is exercised through dominion, violence, division, and exploitation, the believing community is free in Christ to embody her own new culture.<sup>83</sup> As Yoder puts it, “The church is herself a society. Her very existence, the fraternal relations of her members, their ways of dealing with their differences and their needs are, or rather should be, a demonstration of what love means in social relations.”<sup>84</sup> To this extent, it has its own independent *habitus* determined by its own sacramental social practices and processes, shaping its own peculiar form of life. The “otherness of the church” exists as a public alternative, derived from the very fact

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 209. As Yoder puts it here, the community “will live from, not toward, the victory of Christ.”

<sup>84</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002), 17.



that “the church’s responsibility to and for the world is first and always to be the church.”<sup>85</sup>

As a public alternative, moreover, the church also witnesses to a new history and a new future for the world. Because the socio-political existence of the church is a “modeling mission” wherein “[it] is called to be now what the world is called to be ultimately,” as it embodies this alternative it also proclaims the real significance and purpose of history.<sup>86</sup> An apocalyptically doxological people, the believing community in witness celebrates and embodies “an alternative narrative.”<sup>87</sup> It has a different sense of the direction of history, disposed to recognize what is meaningful in orientation to Jesus and the liberating work of God. Like the early church, the believing community in the present knows that it is not the state or the empire that makes history or fills it with meaning. Instead, the believing community knows that the meaning of history is concentrated in and derived from Christ, and as his body, therefore, “the ultimate meaning of history is to be found in the work of the church.”<sup>88</sup> Whereas history left to the powers and principalities of the world in rebellion to God remains enslaved to their self-glorification, domination, and destruction, the believing community has a larger sense of the future based in God’s invasion of things and in the faith that he is at work in the Spirit and in the hope that he will continue to show up.<sup>89</sup> The new social wholeness of the church, trusting in the “guidance of the Paraclete to empower forgiveness and

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<sup>85</sup> Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 109, 115.

<sup>86</sup> Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 92.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>88</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 151. See also, Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 109.

<sup>89</sup> Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 95.

discernment” (Matt. 18, John 20) as the work of God given in Jesus Christ, makes history meaningful and offers hope of more of a future with God.<sup>90</sup> In its apocalyptic style, its otherness is readily apparent and on offer for the world, as “a different way of being keeps breaking in here and now” leading the community forward.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, “It does not assume that time will end tomorrow” but instead “reveals why it is meaningful that history should go on at all.”<sup>92</sup> The social reality of the community as an apocalyptic people testifies to God’s work to make all things new and attests to the material reality of this work by embodying the possibility of a new way of living not directed to the annihilation of history but to its transformation and renewal.

In witness, therefore, the order of inner life of the community remains on display as a public and independent alternative, a new history amidst the old that testifies to a future dominated not by war, oppression, conflict, competition, and destruction but by forgiveness, reconciliation, love, and peace. Attesting to this new reality, simply by practicing this new life, the church offers a real alternative that allows the world to see itself as the world, while proclaiming to it a new significance and future. Hence, the very existence of the social organism of the church is for the world. But as I will show below, this is not the full extent of its interface with the world. In connection with its vocation as witness, the church also carries the task of service to the world, offering out of its internal resources creative alternatives that expose the world to the grace of God. From its

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<sup>90</sup> Yoder, *For the Nations*, 217.

<sup>91</sup> Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 94.

<sup>92</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 105.

witness springs its service, a mode of engagement with the world that creatively seeks to transform the world even as it avoids the temptation to try to take control of the future.

*Service: The New Order for the World*

Witness is not the only way that the believing community interfaces with the world. While its witness cannot be disconnected from the service it offers to the world, I want now to consider the mode and content of the church's service to the world in order to offer a more complete account of its missionality and to establish a basis for the connaturality of community organizing and the church's mission. In the following section, I will argue that the culture of the community arising from its unique experience of time imbues it with a peculiar agency enabling it to seek new ways of dealing with issues and problems the world faces. Acting in a new non-violent power, the believing community finds itself uniquely empowered by its refusal to try to gain control over history or to manage things as a whole with a patiently hopeful and creative service concerned with "[concentrating] upon the identification and removal of one abuse at a time."<sup>93</sup> As a result, it is freed to interface with the world in a posture of radical servanthood.

Oriented within a new history and cosmos subjected to the gracious reign of God, the believing community is liberated from a sense that it must control history or attempt to steer it. Such is its "new style", which, as Yoder puts it, "consists in being a herald of

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<sup>93</sup> Yoder, *For the Nations*, 119.

liberation and not a community of slaves.”<sup>94</sup> It is a freedom and liberation that does not come on the back of dominating others, but is instead correlated to a minoritarian posture. Following Christ, the community’s minoritarian posture refers to its refusal to try to get a “handle” on history or to manage the future through the imposition of its own overarching or strategic program.<sup>95</sup> In its apocalyptic disposition, therefore, the church can reject the Constantinian temptation to see itself as the institution that must secure the future by imposing its will upon the present. From a “minority position” by contrast, it can pursue the qualities of justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, provision, and love corresponding to the reign of God in creative non-violent ways that do not disconnect these ends from the means of reaching them. Trusting in the social processes of its own culture, the church can act in a way that relies upon the power of the Spirit to shape the collective will from the bottom-up instead of seeking to impose its agenda from the top-down.<sup>96</sup> As a result, the community need not sacrifice its commitments for effectiveness in the moment, as those interested in maintaining control must do. In contrast, it can trust that, as Yoder states, “in the long run the right way is also the most effective.”<sup>97</sup> Thus, a political calculus that makes concessions to violence or duplicity in order to procure desirable outcomes is not the only political option for the community. Instead, because it

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<sup>94</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 148-49. In his *The Christian Witness to the State*, Yoder bases his view of the particularity of the church upon the view taken in the Anabaptist tradition, or at least according to the way he understands the view of the church from the Anabaptist tradition. Thus, he describes it as a view of “duality without dualism” in which the world is not an hermetic entity over and against the similarly hermetic and distinct entity of the church, but that the church, in its heightened ethical practice and new constitution of social relations, is an entity that is more internal to the world than the world is to itself. Yoder, *Christian Witness*, 31.

<sup>95</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 228, 233.

<sup>96</sup> Yoder, *For the Nations*, 112-13.

<sup>97</sup> Yoder, *Christian Witness*, 44.

is content to work “through its ordinary social process and its rituals of reconciliation, through its dialogue and disputations,” it need not extinguish conflict or impose solutions through force but can be “an arena for training in conflict resolution and in the search for the truth.”<sup>98</sup> Making room for the Spirit to work, it can take the time to find other possible routes forward and not foreclose resolutions due to a sense of needing to control outcomes. In its independence it discovers a minoritarian freedom, opened up by the sense that it need not manage or attempt to secure the future.

In faithfulness to the politics of Jesus, therefore, the minoritarian posture of the community and its mission in service is shaped by the cross. The cross simply is the mode of non-violence and enemy love that marks the ethic of the new humanity when it meets with the powers and structures of the world threatened by its new way of life.<sup>99</sup> As Yoder notes, just as the cross was for Jesus “the political, legally-to-be-expected result of a moral clash with the powers ruling his society,” so it will be for his followers the expected result of offering a way of life consonant with the new age under and within those principalities with an interest in maintaining the order of the old.<sup>100</sup> The cruciform

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<sup>98</sup> Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 96.

<sup>99</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 53.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 129. The presence of the tactic of non-violence in Yoder’s work remains one of his lasting legacies to the field of theology in the twenty-first century, a legacy that stands in direct connection to the ongoing testimony of the church in time. Stanley Hauerwas, his most notable interpreter, makes this point clearly in saying: “This is John Howard Yoder’s witness, which, as is true of all good witness, does not call attention to itself. Rather it directs attention to the witness of his Anabaptist forebears and to the God who made their lives and deaths possible. If their witness to the power of nonviolence had not existed, then Yoder would have no basis to make the claims he makes. Yet if the Anabaptists had not been witnesses to the Christians across time who had lived faithfully to Christ, then their witness would not have been possible. And the witness of Christians across time would not have been possible if God has not vindicated Christ’s sacrifice on the cross through resurrection and ascension. On the basis of such witnesses, Christians can rightly claim that to bear the cross is not a confession peculiar to them; rather their lives reveal the ‘grain of the universe.’” Hauerwas, *Grain of the Universe*, 225.

posture of the church is the real evidence of its dedication to service through nonviolent servanthood and love in the freedom opened by an apocalyptic orientation. Refusing violence or the forceful imposition of an overall program as the road to freedom, the church through the cross enacts a new liberating power operative in service and love.

Hence, for Yoder, there is real power in servanthood, even if it is different from the type of power that so often operates in society and politics. Challenging the notion that power is univocal or unilateral, Yoder asserts that, “servanthood is not a position of nonpower or weakness. It is an alternative mode of power. It is also a way to make things happen, also a way to be present.”<sup>101</sup> Moreover, at its most basic level, I want to suggest that this alternative power present in the act of servanthood is the exercise of a different time. In order to make the connection I see between power, time, and the cross clear, I want to engage the analysis of power provided by the French Jesuit sociologist and philosopher Michel de Certeau. His discussion of power and agency I think will make more explicit the temporal quality implicit in the posture and method of what Yoder calls the “counter establishment” of the minority community.<sup>102</sup> De Certeau’s analytics of everyday practice, I believe, can offer insight on the tactical operation of the cross,

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<sup>101</sup> Yoder, *For the Nations*, 191. Speaking more to the nature of this power, Yoder comments elsewhere that nonviolence is a mode of love that engages the person while resisting the powers, causes, and structures that are directing him. In order to contest these purposes while maintaining their devotion to the person, the community will need to seek imaginative ways to respond, to act in loving concern for the enemy, or offender, while resisting the evil designs to which he is connected. As he says, “the alternative is creative concern for the person who is bent on evil, coupled with the refusal of his goals.” Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 56.

<sup>102</sup> Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 81-82. In contrast to the notion of Christian responsibility most popularly developed by Reinhold Niebuhr, but developed by other Protestant Liberal thinkers as well, Yoder thinks that such postures attempt to steer history and in doing so are unfaithful to their core because they fail to truly acknowledge the lordship of Christ. As he remarks, “the only way in which the faith can become the official ideology of a power elite in a given society is if Jesus Christ ceases to be concretely Lord” (85).

clarifying how as an exercise of power in weakness it operates within the opportunities of a particular situation to turn the tables on the powerful.<sup>103</sup> By evincing the way in which those not in a position to control and direct things from the seat of power still exercise power through “a clever *utilization of time*, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play it introduces into the foundations of power,”<sup>104</sup> de Certeau’s study will allow me to argue that such a tactical operation is at work in the cruciform service of the church. And his analysis will allow me to conclude, following Yoder, that in the conduct of this operation “the church is both the paradigm and the instrument of the political presence of the gospel”<sup>105</sup> as it actively engages with the world—making use of the world’s rules and structures in its own re-appropriation through the cross to redefine, subvert, and reconfigure them.

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<sup>103</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), xx. An interesting aside here is that de Certeau appeals to the work of the sophists in order to make sense out of the tactics of the weak, noting that “their principle was, according to the Greek rhetorician Corax, to make the weaker position seem the stronger, and they claimed to have the power of turning the tables on the powerful by the way in which they made use of the opportunities offered by the particular situation.” There is more agency in de Certeau than is readily visible in Bourdieu. This point is particularly pertinent for the way in which de Certeau both expands upon and critiques Bourdieu. Arguing that if his theory were to really match his insights he would have to leave certain windows open to the excess and invisible, or something that cannot be theorized, that make practice possible, Bourdieu, so he asserts, would need to take more account of the way that people actively make practices their own, playing upon the fecundity of possibilities and thus allowing us to recognize the fact that many practices are heterogeneous to a unified consumerist understanding of practice. *Ibid.*, 50-60.

Coincidentally, thinking with respect to Paul, it seems to me that there exists a certain affinity between Paul’s comments in I Cor. 1:18-31 and the essence of sophism presented by Corax in de Certeau’s observation. In my research I was only able to find one study that considered Paul’s engagement with the broad and diverse schools of sophistry. See, Bruce W. Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). While Winter comments that most scholars, despite evidence to the contrary, have usually dated revival of sophism in the Second Sophistic to the second century, it was already alive and well during the time of Paul. Though he goes on to argue that Paul contested with the sophists in Corinth, I am keenly interested in the possibility that Paul may also deploy sophistic rhetorical techniques in his discourse of the cross. It is an area I believe rife with possibilities and in need of further and more extensive study.

<sup>104</sup> de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 38-9.

<sup>105</sup> Yoder, *For the Nations*, 189.

The “tactics of the weak,” as de Certeau explains, are juxtaposed to the “strategies of the strong.” While strategies assume a controlled location from which one can develop plans and launch an attack upon an exterior opponent, for de Certeau tactics operate from no such location and thus make use of time.<sup>106</sup> Poaching on the structures the strong have used to organize space and spatial relations so as to give themselves a view of the whole, the weak play on temporal possibilities within these structures to generate new rhythms. Exercising their own unique power in this way, the weak engage in tactics that exploit these temporal possibilities, using what is at hand but putting it in service to a different power.<sup>107</sup> Put in Yoder’s terms, those acting in the mode of the cross resist the totalizing strategies of the powers by carving out new temporal relations within the structures of these powers, creating openings within them instead of attempting to take their place. The enactment of their practices orchestrates a new way of life within while not exactly abiding by the structures and orders of the world. As a result, they generate alternatives within these structures, countering them with distinct and improvised new options. Engaging in the “art of the weak,”<sup>108</sup> such people introduce heterogeneous rhythms within the prefabricated space around them.

To embrace the tactics of the cross, for Yoder, is to deny the notion that “to reject the sword is to withdraw from history,” for the way of the cross is the exercise of a new

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<sup>106</sup> de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, xix.

<sup>107</sup> While de Certeau employs the term “bricolage” in his discussion of the form of tactics, I think he would be critical, as is Yoder, of contemporary usages that tend to downplay what is at stake in these practices. Tactics are not just playing, though they may be playful in their originality. For as the slave knows more intensely than others, these acts of freedom may cost him his life. See *Ibid.*, 29; and Yoder, *For the Nations*, 75-6.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.



agency that subverts and disrupts the regnant order through creative re-rhythmization in the service of new relations.<sup>109</sup> Consistent with its nonviolent mode of enemy love, the appropriation of the given architecture in the tactics of the cross interface with the world by infusing it with its own tempo as a means of creatively reconfiguring the structure of things under the powers. Through these tactics the church engages in non-identical repetition, actively imitating the life of Jesus in its own act of social non-conformity.<sup>110</sup> Interfacing with the world in this way, “[the church] is the social reality of representing in an unwilling world the Order to come.”<sup>111</sup> Nonviolent, minoritarian tactics are the alternative to Constantinianism, a mode of engagement with the world that serves to offer without imposing it the possibility of a different future and a different way. For Yoder, in other words, the way of the cross is an “alternative both to insurrection and quietism” wherein the church is “willing for the sake of its calling to take upon itself the hostility of the given society,” even as it works within this society to subvert it with a different order.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 92.

<sup>110</sup> My understanding of imitation as non-identical repetition is decisively influenced by Kierkegaard, who, if playfully, analyses these concepts at length in this work; see Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/ Repetition*. Graham Ward also provides a helpful definition, when he notes that “Imitation of Christ here is not copying; it is not an imperfect repetition of the same act. It is not an echo. It is a reperformance albeit in another key and on another instrument.” Ward, *Politics of Discipleship*, 278.

<sup>111</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 95-96.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-37. As Yoder recognizes elsewhere, the radical love that lies at the heart of the cross, wherein Jesus displays his free and independent existence by peacefully engaging the ultimate exercise of violent force of the Powers, truly expressing the revolutionary character of his life and his work, decisively distinguishes it from the order established by these Powers. That is to say, the life of Jesus and the way of the cross manifest in the social processes of the community “presupposes a genuine social revolution, a revolution so radical that it is not satisfied with limiting itself to changing the definition of ultimate goals to be reached by the application of the same methods of power used by the oppressors, a revolution so radical that it begins with a new set of methods.” Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 151.

As a minority community acting in the power and service of the cross, thus, the church's engagement with the world can be both more patient and more experimental. Its service resides exactly in the freedom of the time given to it to discover and shrewdly actualize alternatives to the relations posed by the dominant structures set as they are on immediate effectiveness.<sup>113</sup> As political subjects shaped by their hope in God, the believing community not only sees no need to take control but also can more creatively attempt solutions commensurate with this long term view.<sup>114</sup> Because the community is not dedicated to managing society it is free to fail, free to experiment with other options. "The church is more able to experiment because not all ministries need to pay off."<sup>115</sup> Similarly, it can "exercise pioneering creativity", taking on jobs and activities no one else wants to do, and in doing so, attract attention to these areas of social need.<sup>116</sup> Serving in this capacity as a "pilot project," or as a "creative minority," the believing community makes evident that the violent contestations of power are not the only thing that is going on in society. Indeed, where a more coercive power simply acts through its dominion to generalize its own ideas, this creative and experimental minority community poses a more substantial resource for making social change by following a different method in its search for resolutions and in deciding how to meet needs. Whereas it may appear from the perspective of the world, and of its orders and structures, that to reject violence is to withdraw from the political realm, "the logic shifts if we recognize that the number of

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<sup>113</sup> Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 97.

<sup>114</sup> Yoder, "Exodus and Exile," 308-09.

<sup>115</sup> Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 92.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

locks that can be opened with the key of violence is very limited.”<sup>117</sup> Thus, relying on the skills of healing, reconciliation, and forgiveness, the believing community can exercise its own keys, opening up alternative paths as an “active missionary presence” in service to the world and working to transform it one specific concern at a time.<sup>118</sup>

It is part of the church’s missionary existence, according to Yoder, to construct peace within the structures of the world prone to violence. The originality and unique offering of the community springs from the fact that, while “violence can keep out the enemy,” it “cannot build a wholesome society. It can revolt but not create.”<sup>119</sup> Any politics constructed upon violence is thus already genetically programmed for destruction, for revolt, for insurrection and oppression and for degeneration. As a new community ordered by a reconciling love of God, the church can offer an alternative way of peace, as it continually engages in the transformation of human social, economic, and political relations consistent with its call. As Yoder puts it, “Christians are and always have been involved in the social struggle [for freedom and justice] wherever they exist.” Thus, the key is not a question of whether Christians can or will participate in this struggle but “*how* we are to be committed” to this process of revolution, for the process must be commensurate with the form of life revealed and made possible in Jesus Christ.<sup>120</sup> To say this, however, does not imply that the church really is a resource for the

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<sup>117</sup> Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 101.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 101-102.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94. The connection of this pursuit to hope is continually present for Yoder. As he states in *For the Nations*, the work of God “does not bypass our ongoing struggle; yet the criterion guiding us in the struggle is not whether we win, not whether we can implement lesser-evil calculations to get there, but whether we keep the faith.” Yoder, *For the Nations*, 137. Yoder returns to this point in his *Discipleship*

higher and larger purposes of the structures of the state, but it is to say that the church is sent into the real world of sacrifice and sovereignty to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, and to remind these structures of their rightful place. Because the church has a better understanding of why the state exists, part of its service to the world is to make clear to the state its proper function and the limits of that function.<sup>121</sup> Both by calling the powers to modesty and by entering into selective engagement, therefore, the community can practice “conscientious participation,” working to find solutions to problems and bettering the organization of society from a “grassroots level.”<sup>122</sup> Thus, as a “conscience

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*as Political Responsibility*, where he contests the reversal that took place in the early church as it slowly came into a position of power under Emperor Constantine. Here, Yoder believes, the original notion of the early church that all had been brought under the rule of Christ which was proclaimed most radically in lives that embraced the non-coercive and non-violent way of the cross was exchanged for the idea that Christians at times will need to shirk their particularly Christian practices in order to perform their duties for the state. Hence, at the heart of Yoder’s political writings one can see the fundamental attempt to return Christian political activity to its radically Christian expression free from any compromise. See John Howard Yoder, *Discipleship as Political Responsibility*, trans. Timothy J. Geddert (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 62-63. For this reason, Yoder’s work has recently been picked up by political theorists such as Romand Coles, who see it as a resource for displaying how a particular tradition dedicated to its singular practices can at the same time, and as a result of these singular practices, remain vulnerable and receptive to engagement with others in conversation. As Coles comments regarding Yoder, “In other words, he interprets the binding centrality of the lordship of Christ as the opening of dialogical relations between the church and the world in which giving and receiving is possible.” Romand Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics: Reflections for the Future Possibility of Democracy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 111-12. Consequently, I can only think that Yoder would smile at the fact that a secular political theorist is incorporating his ideas in a renewed vision of democracy. Yoder, I think, would hope this to be a testament to his own, and his church’s, ongoing witness. Also, I think Coles is exactly right to see patience to be at the heart of Yoder’s theology when he claims that “Yoder thinks patience as, among so many other qualities, the *gift of time*, for one has been given time: time for vulnerable witnessing and discerning and participating in the unanticipatable breaking forth; patience as a suspension of the socially and existentially engendered pressures upon time to summarize judgment and engage others in summary fashion” (130).

<sup>121</sup> Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, 16.

<sup>122</sup> Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 136; and *Christian Witness to the State*, 20.

and servant within society,” the church is able “to contribute to the creation of social structures more worthy of humanity.”<sup>123</sup>

While distinct in its own right, the church is called to serve the world. I have argued following Yoder, moreover, that it serves the world from the freedom of a minoritarian position. Interfacing with the world, therefore, it does not attempt to take control of things but, in keeping with the way of the cross and the rhythms and tempo of the new age, engages instead in “creative transformation.”<sup>124</sup> It is able to do this because its own internal life provides it with the skills, resources, commitments, and values necessary to pursue such solutions. As a result, it serves the world by extending its own internal life, its own internal practices and procedures, into the world, discovering places where it can offer alternative solutions and different methods for extrapolation. Just as its own life is formed by the love of God, so its interaction with the world is shaped by enemy love, prompting it to search for more peaceful arrangements and to attend to unaddressed issues within society. To this extent, it can open up new social patterns, unlock abusive arrangements, and address neglected concerns within society, making use of its own resources to pursue alternatives that are more peaceful and more just. Also, because it is more equipped to listen and discern, it is able more clearly to define problems and to discover better ways of solving them that are not bound to notions of the inevitability of violence or competition. Providing an alternative path, the church can serve to open alternative doors for the future of the larger society as it creatively seeks to

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<sup>123</sup> Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 133.

<sup>124</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 185.

extend the order and processes it enjoys into the world, offering its methods of judgment and patterns of social relations for experimental extrapolation.

### *Conclusion*

I have argued in this chapter that within a constellation of structuring practices the exercise of the office of the Keys, or the procedural practice of binding and loosing, is central to the political life of the church. I have argued that this practice is a process derived from the apocalyptic nature of the believing community as the exercise of the new mode of power resonant with Christ and the presence of God's sovereign reign. Binding and loosing provides a way for the community to continue to reproduce its own form of life by evaluating, assessing, resynchronizing, and modifying the configuration of its social life. Following the insights of Yoder's ecclesiology, I have argued this sacramental social process provides the new society of the church with its own mode of political judgment and of resolving the issues that arise within its midst so that it can continue to embody its peculiar way of life while navigating new circumstances and encountering new contexts. Comprised of a unique constellation of structuring practices, these sacred social processes give a distinct rhythm and tempo to the church, and binding and loosing offers a sacred means by which to harmonize its life when it falls out of sync or faces new challenges. In the exercise of binding and loosing, as the rehabilitated function of the office of the Keys, the community can discover the possibility of reproducing these practices in the right way and knowing how to discern the reality of the kingdom of God as the conditions of its context change.

Furthermore, I also argued that binding and loosing as a sacred process for dealing with everyday issues and making political judgments could be a resource for addressing the challenges that confound the larger society. As apocalyptic communities, I suggested, congregations are more free and uniquely disposed to locate creative ways forward that can liberate the world from its current configuration and its present course. As an outgrowth of their own culture and based in their distinct experience of time orchestrated in their structuring practices, these communities engage in witness and service to the world as the connatural vocation and mission of their existence. They do so both by extending their own form of life into the world and by making their own practices and processes available to the world for extrapolation. Interfacing with the world in these ways, they act as engines of change, attesting to and working toward an alternative future by participating in the work of God to transform things. Additionally, because binding and loosing as a means of conflict resolution and political judgment operates within the unique power of the Spirit, it can be the base of a new way of pursuing justice and reconciliation through accountability, redemptive dialogue, and creative ingenuity. Because the church already knows that God is sovereign, celebrating his reign in their life, they are also poised to take more risks, informed by a more robust hope that God will show up and lead them into real solutions. In this way, they can operate to lead the world forward without taking control.

Inhabiting a culture of its own, the church is itself “a structure and a power in society,” oriented by the “sovereign presence, within the structures of creaturely

orderliness, of Jesus the kingly claimant.”<sup>125</sup> Contesting the earthly powers and structures, in its independence it offers its own political process and social order as a public witness. It also, by extending its own sacred processes and offering them for extrapolation, engages in the political operations of the world in a way that corresponds to its apocalyptic, eschatological foundation.<sup>126</sup> In doing so, as Yoder observes, the believing community serves “to make known to the Powers, as no other proclaimer can do, the fulfillment of the mysterious purposes of God (Eph. 3:10) by means of Jesus in whom their rebellion has been broken and the pretensions they had raised have been demolished.”<sup>127</sup> A counter-hegemony to the structures and powers of the world, the church can carve out a revolutionary form of life that serves to lead the world to a new future. As Yoder puts it, “the believing body of Christ is the world on the way to its renewal; the church is the part of the world that confesses the renewal to which all the world is called. The believing body is the instrument of that renewal of the world, to the (very modest) extent to which its message is faithful. It may be ‘instrument’ as proclaimer, or as pilot project, or as pedestal.”<sup>128</sup> With hope for the future, the believing community can engage because it recognizes that “There is a fitting pattern of expecting more of what is already given in the life of the church.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 158.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>128</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 78. Yoder comments elsewhere that “there is not greater contribution that can be made by the tiny people of God in the revolution of our age than to be that people, both separate from the world and identified with its needs, both the soul of society (without which it cannot live) and its conscience (with which it cannot be at peace).” Yoder, *Revolutionary Christianity*, 167.

<sup>129</sup> Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 278.



Based upon the central process of binding and loosing, in the next chapter I argue that congregation-based community organizing presents one way that the church's own life is extended in to the world and extrapolated for broader political renewal. As I will show, the independence of the church as well as the various resources, skills, commitments, and values intrinsic to its worship and invigorated in the process of binding and loosing inform and undergird this work. As a minority group, the church "is more able to maintain a strong bargaining posture" than are other organizations gathered simply by identity or ideology. Moreover, as Yoder continues, "the faith community has both the cultural and normative wherewithal to make that fractional bargaining constructive and honest, and the internal cohesion to keep its leaders accountable and its bargaining goals realistic," all of which are essential ingredient for effective, long-term organizing. Finally, while not denying its own interest in the projects it pursues, because the community practices listening, accountability, reconciliation, and love in social relations, "it is able to claim that its social goals are in the interest of others" and able to ground a more experimental and justly oriented process of political decision-making.<sup>130</sup> Believing that "the primary social structure through which the gospel works to change other social structures is that of the Christian community,"<sup>131</sup> following Yoder's ecclesiology, I will argue that one extant and potent vehicle for pursuing this transformation is congregation-based community organizing. It is to the substance and

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<sup>130</sup> Yoder, *Priestly Kingdom*, 98.

<sup>131</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 154.

activity of congregation-based grassroots organizing, especially with relation to the practice of binding and loosing, that I will now turn.

# **Chapter 3**

## **The New Rules of Engagement:**

### **Community Organizing and the Apocalyptic Community in the World**

The first two chapters of part one of this study have presented a theological framework for the political hope at work in congregation-based community organizing. In chapter one, beginning with the work of God in Jesus Christ, I described how this particular revelation endows the believing community with a unique political subjectivity, transforming time and history by ordering them under the sovereignty of Christ. I asserted that the political subjectivity of the community is apocalyptic in nature, oriented by the revelation of Christ and by the sovereignty of his reign. Therefore, the church faces the future with hope, tasting the charitable reign of God and trusting that he remains at work in their midst. In chapter two, then, I described how the apocalyptic political subjectivity of the church is embodied in their structuring practices and social processes. A new pattern of social relations, I argued, characterizes the church under the lordship of Christ, arranging it in love, mutual provision, peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness. As the method of abiding within the rule of Christ, I suggested, binding and loosing is the central practice that resynchronizes the rhythm and choreography of the social body and it is also a way to discover what it means to remain in resonance to Jesus in new contexts and as new challenges arise. In the practice of the process binding and loosing, the church continues concretely and materially to enact the reign of God in its

form of life by resolving conflicts and discerning how it is to be the body of Christ in its context. While doing so, the church is at the same time a community whose life is directed in witness to and service of the world. As distinct political subjects, formed by the revelation of God in Christ and the order of his reign, the church engages the world with the hope of transforming it more to accord with love and justice. The question for the church, therefore, is never whether or not to be involved but *how* and *where* to be involved.<sup>1</sup>

If standing on the sidelines is not a possibility for the church, then what might a theologically informed engagement look like? How might the church missionally interface with contemporary society and where might it direct its energies to pursue change? The argument of this chapter is that congregation-based community organizing is an apposite act of the church's mission. Because congregations are the component parts of congregation-based community organizations (CBCOs), CBCOs work off of the new pattern of social relations practiced in the transformed time of the church to embody a unique power of political hope. In contrast to the despair that dominates so much of liberal democratic theory or the lack of material concern that permeates chiliastic religious and political perspectives, the hope guiding congregations engaged in the earnest, patient, and persistent work of organizing points them toward working for structural and societal change. Community organizing aims to transform social relations and governing structures to coincide more with the love, justice, and gracious provision

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<sup>1</sup> Yoder, *For the Nations*, 235. As Yoder notes, "There is no special realm of 'politics' which Christians, or the church, can avoid and leave to its own resources, or leave to be run by its own rules."

of God. To this extent, CBCOs “offer a way for faith to shape a broadly progressive politics” that relies on theological convictions to give meaning to democratic participation and to reinvigorate public life with vitality without falling prey to the theological distortions and power grabbing that characterize the Religious Right.<sup>2</sup> Neither prone to liberal dilution nor conservative Constantinianism, community organizing presents a true third alternative for reshaping political engagement and society in an effective and faithful manner.

Eschewing notions of political practice that strip commitments and perspectives of their theological roots in order to enter the public realm, the unique approach of congregation-based community organizing instead relies upon the power of the particular commitments of the church to impact the larger society from a minority position, allowing them to be more hopeful, more patient, more experimental, and more critical. In other words, because they believe the world to already be subjected to Christ, congregations involved in this activity are able to witness to the unique possibilities opened up in history by his reign and to locate experimental ways of actualizing this reality in institutions and structures of the larger public life.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, while congregation-based organizing does not shy away from power but instead exercises it as it works for transformation, the mode of its power is shaped by the cross of Jesus Christ, operating in non-violent service to the culture even as it continues to work to change it.

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<sup>2</sup> Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 242.

<sup>3</sup> As Luke Bretherton recognizes, congregation-based organizing does not fit within the liberal framework established by Niebuhr’s Christian realism, due to the fact that “first, Christian realism occludes explicitly ecclesial forms of political engagement; second, it justifies the kind of liberal interest-group politics that Alinsky opposes; and third, its separation of power and love conceals how these are integrated in Alinsky’s work.” Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 89.

As a unique vehicle for missional interface with the world, CBCOs rely on the particular resources and commitments of the political culture of the church to shape policy decisions, resolve conflicts, and develop new structures that transform the larger society. Starting from the peculiar commitments and relational patterns fostered by the worship practices of their congregations, CBCOs *extend* the convictions and relational patterns of the church into the larger political arena by *extrapolating* its procedures for the purpose of creating new, more loving and just arrangements. Because they rely on congregations, not only do they provide a vision for what society might look like derived from the convictions and arrangements embodied in the church's worship, allowing them to name the injustice of the status quo, but more specifically, CBCOs extrapolate from the ecclesial process of binding and loosing in order to address the wrongs it encounters in society, engaging for change at the site of wounds. Employing this method, CBCOs work through conflicts and discern better arrangements. Extending and extrapolating from the church's own pattern of social relations and means of practical rationality and political judgment, CBCOs deploy this collective discernment in conflict resolution and making decisions to pursue a more just social order. While I do not presume to equate CBCOs with the church, I do argue that CBCOs are a faithful vehicle of the church's mission because they offer a way to interface with the larger social and political institutions of the world that relies up the church's sacred social processes and operates from its distinct commitments to pose alternatives. Congregation-based organizing, therefore, arises in the public interface between the new age of the church and the old age of the powers, opening new possibilities for change and the hope of a different future.

Shaped by the missionary activity of the church in witness and service, congregation-based community organizing provides a vehicle through which to extend the reign of God and to extrapolate from its processes to seek love and justice.

To make this argument, I return to the story of conflict resolution that I described at the start of my introduction, situating this instance within NC United Power's broader campaign against usury and foreclosure. As I do so, I will describe how the component parts of this campaign correspond to and are an extrapolation of the sacred process of binding and loosing. The conflict with the members of St. Martin's in Charlotte, NC, and the subsequent meetings called by Fr. Smith provide a window into the very workings of community organizing itself, allowing us to see the healthy role of conflict both for holding elites accountable as well as for making societal change when congregations identify wrongs, listen, and participate in an authentic exercise of the rule of Christ.

While this chapter is more narrative in style, roughly chronicling the events of NC United Power's campaign against usury from the summer of 2009 to the fall of 2012, it is not a complete account of all the activities of this effort. Instead, I map the key elements of this effort onto the process of binding and loosing in order to illustrate more clearly how the process forms the basis of CBCOs and how it extends and extrapolates from it. I do, however, attempt to remain as faithful as possible to the story of how these events unfolded. My aim is to show how the work of NC United Power relied on the new political subjectivity of the church to engage in truly hopeful and powerful democratic action aimed at addressing some of the deepest issues emerging from the financial crisis. Recounting the efforts, I also point to the way in which community organizing, by

stressing the process of binding and loosing, serves to give the church back gifts it has neglected. Helping the church rediscover the practice of the exercise of the Keys, CBCOs help to rehabilitate congregations in the skills they possess for addressing conflict and re-empowering them to discern new ways to resolve them. In the end, I will also discuss the limits and challenges of this campaign, which I take to illustrate the limits of this form of organizing more generally. But I also conclude that some of these limits are intrinsic to binding and loosing itself.

This chapter, therefore, will describe how the public nature of the church discussed in the last chapter finds a consistent vehicle for political engagement in congregation-based community organizing instead of seeing such activity as alien or ancillary to the more specific activity of the church.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the connections I narrate display that, when considered theologically, congregation-based community organizing, while not a church in itself, opens a channel for missional interface with the world that relates organically to the worship life of these believing communities. Because they have been trained in the tempo of a peculiar political culture to process conflicts and make decisions, churches involved in community organizing can understand their work as a natural outgrowth of their internal social life. As Luke Bretherton rightly suggests, community organizing is a peculiar “form of political asceticism or disciplined formation,” but even more, as I will assert, it is a form of political engagement that aims at sacralizing the political process.<sup>5</sup> Emerging from the social ethic of the church itself, it deeply

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<sup>4</sup> Warren, Stout, Swarts, Hart, and even Wood all tend to take this position.

<sup>5</sup> Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 77.



challenges the way things are. Churches involved in CBCOs, therefore, do not simply offer a few vague spiritual or moral ideas that might find natural echoes in general notions of the common good. But instead, as my theological approach to organizing will show, it is that community organizing is a way of extending the church's pattern of social relations into the context of American society to disrupt and reshape its form of life.<sup>6</sup> Through CBCOs the new time of the believing community becomes the basis of a new political hope. In contrast to a theology of public life that fits too neatly into the way things are and trusts in the myth of progress or a pessimistic communitarianism that gives up on the world and lives in withdrawal, community organizing depends on the public nature of the church to lead the world forward toward a future it could not foresee and left on its own could never fashion out of the way things are.

### *Listening in Crisis and Naming Specific Wrongs*

In the late spring of 2009, as the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression was unfolding and while most pundits, financiers, and politicians scrambled to offer quick solutions, NC United Power affiliates (the statewide federation of local IAF organizations) devoted themselves to listening. The stock market had collapsed, falling nearly 7,500 points from its high in the fall of 2007 to the lows of the spring of 2009 due

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<sup>6</sup> Congregation-based organizing, as I see it, is an apposite missional channel for the church within the context of democratic states, but I do not make the case for this form of engagement unconditionally. As Yoder remarks, "There can be no one timeless right way to relate church and state—or for that matter church and university, church and banking, church and the arts—for that other member of the comparison—the state, the economy—has no one firm meaning." Yoder, *For the Nations*, 234. Thus, while there are things about community organizing that connect it organically to the life of the church, because there is no set structure for the state it may not always be a relevant vehicle. The question for us, however, is whether it is a relevant missional vehicle today. I believe it is.

to the bursting of the housing market bubble. Poor, if complex, lending practices had the banks' balance sheets plagued with toxic mortgages and fragile investments tagged to these bad mortgages. Unemployment ballooned, as credit markets froze and the economy began to shrink rapidly. In an attempt to assuage the massive losses they had accrued as a result, financial institutions began to rely more heavily on increasing rates of interest and charging new fees.<sup>7</sup> Conducting surveys, individual relational meetings, and small group discussions the congregations affiliated with NC United Power in collaboration with other organizations in Metro IAF's larger network throughout the east coast and Midwest were hearing stories of lost homes and pensions, evaporating retirements and savings, and mass layoffs. Meeting face to face with individuals, the pain of those suffering under the pressures of high interest and predatory lending practices was plainly heard.<sup>8</sup> In search of ways to regain profits, banks were passing their debt on to individuals, squeezing them for more with rate increases, penalties, and fees. As NC United Power quickly discovered, the people were reaching their breaking point, feeling hopeless because they

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz reports that by October of 2009, while the "'advertised' unemployment rate" was 10.2 percent, if it had included the "'involuntary' part-time workers and discouraged workers," the percentage of folks that were truly unemployed and underemployed had reached 17.5 with only 58.5 percent of working age people employed. See Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Freefall: America, Free Markets, and the Sinking of the World Economy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 64. One Pew study found that between March of 2007 and February of 2008, 70 million credit card holders experienced increases in rates of interest charged, some of these running as high as 25-35%. The Pew Charitable Trusts, "Safe Credit Card Standards: Policy Recommendations for Protecting Credit Cardholders and Promoting a Functional Marketplace," as part of the Pew Safe Credit Cards Project (March 31, 2009), available online at <http://www.pewhealth.org/reports-analysis/reports/safe-credit-card-standards-85899378853>

<sup>8</sup> Metro Industrial Areas Foundation, "10% Is Enough: Background on a National Anti-Usury Campaign" and "10% Is Enough Campaign." Both of these internal papers were released in July 2009 and are available online at: <http://www.10percentisenough.org/sites/default/files/documents/Metro%20IAF%20background%20paper.pdf> and <http://www.10percentisenough.org/sites/default/files/documents/10%20Percent%20Is%20Enough.pdf>

had no way of addressing the injustices with political officials or banking executives. Meeting after meeting echoed the same cry for relief, help, and work.

That NC United Power, as a CBCO, began by listening, conducting individual and small group meetings, however, is not odd. “IAF organizations do politics very differently from Washington,” as one reporter put it in December of 2009. “Players in Washington believe they are close to completing financial reform. IAF members believe that the politics of financial reform is just getting started.”<sup>9</sup> Relational meetings are the life-blood of their organizing. As Jeffrey Stout observes, “One-to-one conversations, neighborhood walks, and house meetings are the basic practices of grassroots organizing.”<sup>10</sup> One of the key aspects of the mode of community organizing employed by IAF organizations is that it is rooted in relationships. By meeting together, whether individually or in small (house) groups, community organizations create an open forum for listening and intimate interaction. Allowing folks to express their frustrations and to talk about the issues they are facing, they foster trust, understanding, and solidarity.<sup>11</sup> Community organizing begins with connecting people, listening to one another, and developing relationships; and it is because they are relationally genetic that congregations serve so well as the primary components of grassroots organizing.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Stop Usury Now,” *The Nation*, December 10, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 44.

<sup>11</sup> Swarts, *Organizing Urban America*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Warren discusses the importance of religion in being an initial source of trust foundational to the establishment of an IAF organization in Fort Worth, TX. As part of the formation of this organization, Warren details the need for folks in the city to develop relationships across racial and class lines. Their shared Christian convictions provided the basis for their mutual collaboration, and as I would put it, learning to inhabit their baptism together before launching their collective effort. See Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 103-06.

The relational nature of CBCO's is not accidental, indeed it is quite intentional. And, from a theological perspective, it is not merely coincidental that the development of relational connections stands at the heart of this work. Shaped by their induction into a "new society" and a "new humanity," as I described in the previous chapter, church communities participating in CBCOs already intuit the importance of creating connections. Building off of the relational nature of the baptismal commitments cultivated within these communities, house meetings and individual relational meetings provide further avenues through which to develop connections and to build unity and solidarity. Resisting the temptation to see one another as individuals in competition, the goal of relational meetings, like the narrative meaning of baptism, is to create mutual connection and deep commitment to one another across divisions. Through relational meetings, CBCOs seek to enrich, extend, and strengthen the interpersonal connections already established in congregations by the corporate rite of baptism.

As they are appropriately named, the fundamental function of these relational meetings is to weave a rich social fabric for the organization by establishing tangible connections. Before issues are located and campaigns initiated, the act of listening in relational meetings serves to forge powerful bonds between community members and to bridge divides. As Ed Chambers, the originator of this aspect of IAF organizing laconically puts it: "Issues follow relationships."<sup>13</sup> Abiding by the relational nature of the "new humanity" introduced in baptism, relational meetings act to embody

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<sup>13</sup> Edward T. Chambers with Michael A. Cowan, *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 46.

interdependence and solidarity by connecting people. Organizationally, these one-to-one meetings serve to form commitments between individuals through setting up intentional interactions where they can meet face to face, check each other out, get a sense of one another's deep passions, hear each other's stories, and probe one another's willingness and capacity to work for change. Relational meetings, as Chambers notes, "are the glue that brings diverse collectives together," providing them with the sense of shared loyalty necessary for acting together.<sup>14</sup> Hence, these are not merely a time to meet up for idle chit-chat, or to share cordial congenialities, but much like the unions formed through baptismal vows, these meetings are conducted with the intension of establishing new, public relationships.

Individual relationships are then cultivated even more by expanding them into small group or house meetings, where small collectives of concerned citizens meet together to discuss their own frustrations and to locate converging concerns and desires.<sup>15</sup> Building off of the connections made in the one-to-one meetings, Stout observes, "the house meeting retains the emotional contact of face-to-face interaction and the element of storytelling, but because it includes as many as a dozen people, it works somewhat

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 44. While he is clear to establish that relational meetings do not have a set format but must remain flexible enough to bend to each situation and to each person, Chambers states that the relational meeting: "is for the purpose of developing a public relationship; focuses on the spirit and values of the other; requires an intentional focus that goes beyond ordinary conversation; necessitates probing and agitating the depths of the other; demands a measure of vulnerability on both sides; applies selectivity, with leaders only; bridges the barriers of race, religion, class, gender, and politics; is a form of art that requires patient development and use of particular skills" (53).

<sup>15</sup> With respect to the role of these one-to-one meetings, Mark Warren has observed that "The IAF realized such meetings could help bring disconnected community residents together to talk about common concerns and develop plans of action. House meetings and individual meetings became ways to strengthen community and undertake political action—and to link the two together for mutual benefit." Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 61.

differently and fulfills additional functions.”<sup>16</sup> Within these meetings, people’s individual stories, relayed in one-to-one meetings, strike resonances with others and the vulnerability in sharing opens up the possibility of new connections. Serving to amplify the voice of those suffering wrongs and to discover overlapping themes, house meetings not only broaden connections within the organization but they also begin to pave the way for mobilization.<sup>17</sup> By cultivating these relationships through listening and probing, the organization can begin to locate possibilities for working together in collective action and to plan initiatives aimed at a shared desire for change.<sup>18</sup> In doing so, this form of congregation-based organizing offers a new and wider avenue through which to enact the new relations created in their baptism, providing time for people to forge new connections, to listen to the offended, and to discover together a shared interest in their way of life.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, due to the fact that CBCOs such as those that make up NC United Power are comprised of congregational units already united in shared convictions and commitments, both individual and house meetings provide opportunities to name

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<sup>16</sup> Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 154.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>18</sup> As Richard Wood notes, “The purpose of bridging social capital is to bring a much broader range of Americans together so that they can build the kind of mutual understanding upon which cooperation for shared interests and the common good can be sustained.” Wood, *Faith in Action*, 99. Building trust among individuals is not a step within the process of organizing that can be skipped, for without the trust established within a shared relationship the organization never develops a basis of power and, hence, will never get much off the ground. Additionally, Jeffrey Stout describes “house meetings” as “small group discussions in which people exchange stories about their concerns. In these meetings people begin to discover that some of [sic] their own concerns resemble the concerns that other people have.” Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 42-3.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Wood finds that “faith-based organizing federations... perform a different bridging function in American life: they provide links among communities that frequently coexist in relative isolation from one another.” Wood, *Faith in Action*, 144. To the extent that they really perform this bridging function, congregations begin to embody the interethnic community, which, as we saw in the last chapter, is the material manifestation of the kingdom of God initiated in and by Christ.

injustice while voicing hopeful alternatives. The moral judgments made in the meetings serve to craft a shared sense of concern with the offenses being endured and to begin to point the participants toward a desire for more just alternatives. “Effective house meetings,” Stout suggests, “move toward increasingly precise application of value-laden concepts. They also tend to shift attention toward what *ought* to be changed and away from what *I am upset about* and what *I want*.”<sup>20</sup> At base, the meetings develop relational power, a power originating from their core commitments and hopes and their shared concern for those being wronged in the community. Having come together and joined in a shared articulation of the wrongs and offenses affecting their lives, participants develop solidarity around those concerns and begin to formulate a unified sense of what a more just alternative might be.

Such individual and house meetings stood at the center of the work of NC United Power. Conducting an intensive round of individual and house meetings, member organizations began to develop a unified vision of the problems their people faced and to build the solidarity necessary to form a base of relational power to confront the banks and their political allies. Building trust also allowed individuals to step out of the shame and loneliness associated with economic failure, connecting them with others ready to address the issues they faced. The meetings let people know they were not alone, finding their own frustrations articulated by others as well as a community willing to listen to and address the issues they were facing. In the process, they discovered that they had common needs and shared objectives, allowing individuals within NC United Power’s

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<sup>20</sup> Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 158.

member organizations to develop relationships across lines of race, gender, and social class. Women and men from some 300 congregations and other associations from various socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds participated in the meetings and began to develop a shared agenda and a collective plan for pursuing change. Working with congregations to coordinate relational meetings, NC United Power began to develop a thick core of personal connections enriched by the ethical commitments of the church.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, these relational meetings accomplished two other important objectives for community organizing, all of which can be understood in connection to the elements of the church's social process of binding and loosing I described in the last chapter. First, as already suggested, these small, intimate meetings provided an opportunity for the organization to hear from their people what wrongs and offenses they were experiencing. The focus of these meetings, as I noted, was to open up a space for people to name the injustices and particular issues adversely affecting their lives; the meetings allowed them to form deep relational connections with one another by articulating the specific wrongs they needed resolved.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, the offenses and issues identified in these meetings became the source for a larger campaign, emerging from the bottom up. As a result, instead of having a vague and broad agenda set by a few folks at the top of the organization, specific issues arose on the relational floor and were introduced by the people struggling against them.<sup>23</sup> Hence, in direct connection

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<sup>21</sup> Wood makes similar observations in *Faith in Action*, 35.

<sup>22</sup> Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 159. Stout observes that, because "it gathers together people who are at least somewhat upset about how things are going and interested in seeing them change," the naming of these specific issues is "one of the most important features of a house meeting."

<sup>23</sup> Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 51; Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 150.



to the process of binding and loosing described in the last chapter, NC United Power's process of community organizing began with real, concrete offenses. In this way, it offered an opportunity for those who, because they lack economic means and political privilege, did not have a voice in society to make known the injustices being enacted upon them.

Within the series of relational meetings conducted by NC United Power affiliates, a specific set of issues were repeatedly identified, all of which suggested a real problem with predatory lending practices. Reporting on the results of what these meetings uncovered, a summary document stated, "our people are hurting because of crushing debt loads exacerbated by exorbitant interest rates—in the form of high credit card premiums, payday loans, banking and check-cashing fees, subprime mortgages, rapid-refund tax return schemes, car-title scams, and other practices that reap benefits from financial misfortune."<sup>24</sup> Research instigated by the list of concerns soon began to uncover a widespread and systemic problem allied to these practices. Having cut through the silence and shame that helped to maintain the veneer of legitimacy, the listening sessions gave concrete voice to the alarming degree of injustice and exploitation rampant throughout the finance industry. While driving Americans to triple the debt they held in 1980, lending institutions had managed to rake in as much as an extra \$10 billion per year in additional credit card interest charges above and beyond the normal rates and fees they were already charging.<sup>25</sup> The average rate increased to 15 percent, with a third of card

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<sup>24</sup> Metro IAF, "10% Is Enough: Background on a National Anti-Usury Campaign," 1.

<sup>25</sup> David Harvey reports that "in the U.S. in 1980 the average household owed around \$40,000 (in constant dollars) but now it's about \$130,000 for every household, including mortgages." Harvey, *Enigma*

holders paying over 20 percent and some paying rates as high as 41 percent.<sup>26</sup> Even more troubling, though the drastic disparities in income have been well documented, the strategies financial institutions employed to accrue such windfalls were ones that disproportionately preyed upon the poor, uninformed, and disadvantaged.<sup>27</sup> Predatory lending schemes, pay day loans, adjustable-rate mortgages, credit card rate changes, and additional fees were just some of the strategies used to fleece the poor and middle-class. The offenses and hardships identified in the relational meetings pointed to a deep societal problem yet to be addressed.

Given this situation, it was clear to leaders within Metro IAF and NC United Power that something had to be done on this point. As Gerald Taylor, head of NC United Power, put it, “it became obvious that we had to do something... the implications were too large, the impacts too great.” While the problem seemed large, their organizing

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*of Capital*, 17. The increase in household debt, as Harvey notes, is directly connected to the relative stagnation of average wages, if not decrease in real wages, over the course of this period. As a result, households (no doubt trusting in the equity they were accruing in their homes) relied on credit to maintain their standard of living, effectively living well beyond their means. In addition, a 2009 report by the Pew Charitable Trust investigating abusive credit card practices found that between 2007 and 2008, “by rewriting agreements, and by giving themselves broad contractual rights to impose fees and rate increases automatically,” the financial institutions providing these credit cards have been able to extract an extra “\$10 billion in additional interest charges on top of standard rates and fees.” Pew Charitable Trusts, “Safe Credit Card Standards.” In addition, as this study notes, much of the mounting credit card debt for consumers (some \$900 billion by the end of 2008) is a result of the high rate of unemployment, as households tend to fall behind during this time and incur more fees and ever-higher rates as a result.

<sup>26</sup> Carl Hulse, “Senate Rejects Limit on Credit-Card Interest Rates,” *The Caucus: The Politics and Government Blog of the NY Times*, May 13, 2009, available online at: <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/05/13/senate-rejects-limit-on-credit-card-interest-rates/>

<sup>27</sup> A comprehensive discussion of income disparity and opportunity inequality can be found in Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012). One critical observation that Stiglitz makes in this study, however, is that while there are many aspects of the financial system that have driven the increasing income, wealth, and opportunity disparity dominating American culture, one of the most “egregious” and yet most lucrative for these institutions has been “to take advantage of the poor and uninformed, as they made enormous amounts of money by preying upon these groups with predatory lending and abusive credit card practices” (37).

experience taught them that they would need to break the problem up into winnable issues, identifying a point of leverage on a single issue where they could focus their energy and which provided the best possibility for achieving the desired outcome.<sup>28</sup> For those within NC United Power, and within Metro IAF more broadly, the definable issue that emerged from these meetings, and the research and discussions that followed them, was *usury*. While it was clear that this issue was not an easy win, and that it did not incorporate every facet of the types of exploitation faced by their constituents, it did clarify their focus by defining it theologically and allow them to develop a campaign to address these issues. One peculiar aspect of the structure of these CBCOs is that because they identify issues by listening to their people and articulate them theologically, they are genetically designed with staying power even for a long and arduous fight.<sup>29</sup> Though addressing usury was not going to be easy, once identified and clarified, NC United Power was poised to act immediately even as it also recognized that patience was need to proceed one step at a time until each offense was addressed and resolved. Like binding and loosing, NC United Power's activity was not simply a demonstration or a one-time protest, but it is a continual and ongoing process, aimed at harmonizing an imbalanced and disjointed society. CBCOs, as organizations comprised of individual churches (social organisms), understand politics as a living process, one requiring continual conversation, patient attention to issues, and time for collective discernment and judgment. The leaders

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<sup>28</sup> "An issue," as Jeffrey Stout recognizes, "is a *contestable matter of concern*, on which the group might consider *taking action*. An ideal issue, from the vantage of political action, is not only sufficiently well defined to be contestable, but also important and winnable." Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 157.

<sup>29</sup> Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 150. Stout, of course, while recognizing the "long haul" political engagement of community organizations does not adequately acknowledge the role of theological framing for providing them with their political staying power.

within NC United Power knew that while public confrontations would be necessary to the campaign against usury, events like these would only be one component of a more comprehensive and lengthier effort. But they also recognized that because its roots went deep into the structure of society and because it struck a deep emotional chord with their members it could not be left aside.

Beyond merely offering opportunities to connect and to identify issues, these relational and house meetings also provide CBCOs like NC United Power with a forum to locate and recruit new leaders. Indeed, recruiting and training new leaders is one of the fundamental activities of community organizing.<sup>30</sup> Hence, while advanced leaders conduct meetings, they remain on the outlook for persons who possess both a sense of outrage at the current situation and the unique gifts, skills, and talents to address the specific problems being mentioned.<sup>31</sup> Once designated, organizations seek to develop emerging leaders to take a more active role in their community. The constant inflow of leaders energizes the work and often times they bring new skills needed to develop real solutions. Having been trained, they are then empowered to generate assemblies, host forums, conduct new meetings, and propose campaigns. From top to bottom, or better from bottom to top, community organizing relies on recruiting, training, and developing indigenous leaders, always careful to abide by the Iron Rule of organizing which states:

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<sup>30</sup> Warren states it even more strongly, asserting that “The IAF describes its primary task, its *raison d’être*, to be the development of leadership.” Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 212.

<sup>31</sup> As Jeffrey Stout recognizes, while “anger is one of the most important traits they look for in potential leaders... the ideal future leader is not someone possessed by blind rage, but rather someone capable, at least in the long run, of focusing anger on injustices and of achieving the emotional balance required to think clearly about what is actually going on, how wrongs can be righted, and how broken and distorted relationships might be repaired.” Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 64.

“Never do for others what they can do for themselves.” Drawing lay leaders into their work, CBCOs engage in a kind of public liturgy, a true work of the people aimed at recasting and reshaping specific social and political issues.

At this very basic level churches play a critical role. Because they possess resources for how to hold a meeting (rule of Paul) and how to recognize one another’s gifts (fullness of Christ), their members are already trained with basic social knowledge and skills, providing a rich network of nascent leaders that can be developed.<sup>32</sup> Training these leaders and empowering them to use the particular skills and gifts they possess, CBCOs trust the resources of their own communities to be able deal with these issues. Functioning in this way, the church finds in community organizing a vehicle for interfacing with the world whose mode of operation is commensurate with the mission of the church and which can be understood theologically as sensitive to the lead and advent of the Spirit. Recognizing, as Yoder puts it, that “the need is not for a beautiful vision to impose from above by authority” but instead “for critical resources to apply from below,” CBCOs embody this theological insight by relying on and developing indigenous leaders who have been shaped by the worship life of their community and by extending and

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<sup>32</sup> Pointing to the fundamental role played by congregations, Warren notes, “The IAF’s ability to train hundreds of indigenous community leaders to develop issue campaigns—to hold house meetings, conduct research, develop policy, lobby public officials, and negotiate with business representatives—rests in those congregations.” Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 191. Warren goes on to suggest in his study that he found Catholic congregations to be better positioned to do IAF organizing than many, especially white, Protestants. However, the primary reasons he reports for this suggestion are their larger size on average and their ability to mobilize a greater percentage of their population (193). As a Protestant, in part, one of my reasons for writing this dissertation is to not only place before Protestant congregations an understanding of the church that invites more lay involvement but also to argue that such a community also presents one that can be more actively mobilized for political engagement. Hence, recovering and rehabilitating the practice of binding and loosing is of ultimate importance for the future of these congregations and for the role they can play in community organizing.

extrapolating these ecclesial procedures for the purpose of addressing issues in larger society. Consistent with the practice of binding and loosing and the recognition of gifts, community organizing resists over-professionalization, empowering and integrating participants as leaders by tapping their skills and gifts in the pursuit of creating more just arrangements.

From the initial series of listening sessions, the “10% Is Enough” campaign was born. Aimed at attempting to help folks escape the shackles of debt and unfair credit schemes, NC United Power began to mobilize its relational base to challenge these structures and it recruited leaders within its network to provide the skills and unique gifts necessary to craft an alternative possibility. Along with establishing an economic team to research interest rates, family debt, and possible avenues for campaigns to combat these abuses, one affiliate organization in Durham, NC, Durham Congregations, Associations, and Neighborhoods (CAN), worked with a member congregation, Mt. Level Missionary Baptist, to conduct a series of finance classes to help people understand and spot these credit traps and to work together to begin to break the hold of debt over their lives.<sup>33</sup> To teach this financial literacy class the congregation appointed Reverend Maggie Crandall, a 61-year-old former business consultant turned volunteer associate minister. Having worked in finance, Reverend Crandall possessed the skills necessary to teach basic finance courses, allowing her to develop as a leader in the process. Working to help individuals buried in debt, Crandall’s classes deployed what she called her “micro-

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<sup>33</sup> Beyond my own notes and recollection of these incidents I rely on the documentation of these events provided in Jesse James DeConto, “Forgive Us Our Debts: Reporting on Faith-Based Campaign Against High Interest Rates,” (MA Thesis: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010).

strategy,” educating people on how credit works and how to become less reliant on it.<sup>34</sup> Expressing her own frustration with the system as well as her enthusiasm for helping people in this way, Crandall said, “I just have wanted to do this for so long, I would just give anything to make it happen. I’m tired of the banks making people captive.”<sup>35</sup> Through community organizing she became a leader in the campaign against usury, using her gifts to help others.

Other leaders from Durham CAN’s economic team worked with NC United Power leadership and other IAF affiliates across the country to conduct economic research, write internal documents clarifying the deleterious economic impact of predatory lending, and help define alternative arrangements. These leaders hosted various workshops and forums throughout the winter of 2009 and spring of 2010, designed to help people understand the crisis and to explain how the activities of financial institutions and politicians were affecting them. Mobilizing resources and empowering leaders, NC United Power assembled over 500 of them together in Winston Salem, NC on February 21, 2010 to successfully garner the commitment of three senatorial candidates, who vowed to support caps on interest rates and expanded borrower protection for military households. In March a group of these leaders would visit Washington, DC to ask for similar commitments from members of congress.<sup>36</sup>

By beginning with the discipline of listening, NC United Power, relying upon the resources of its congregations, would cultivate solidarity, identify specific issues to work

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<sup>34</sup> Jesse James DeConto, “Forgive Us Our Debts,” 25.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>36</sup> IAF Southeast, 2010 Progress Report. Online at: [http://www.iafsoutheast.com/2010\\_report.pdf](http://www.iafsoutheast.com/2010_report.pdf)

on, and locate new leaders with the potential skills and gifts necessary to address these issues.<sup>37</sup> Listening to their people, a call for justice began to emerge from the Great Recession of 2008, initiating a campaign to confront the financial industry and to end usurious lending practices and unfair foreclosure. While elites and officials continued to deflect responsibility and to refuse to consider the impact of their practices on average people, by listening and by allowing people to voice their frustrations and their needs NC United Power was able to identify wrongs and to formulate a campaign against what their theological convictions prompted them to name as the sin of usury. To counter a business and regulatory culture directed toward remedying the losses of the financial industry as quickly as possible, they initiated their own political process aimed at helping people in trouble, operating according to a different time table and with a different focus.

### *Articulating Convictions and Challenging Culture*

Without a moral vision of justice, love, and the good, however, there would be no way to truly identify offenses and wrongs because there would be no sense among these congregants and organizers of the way things should be. Because of its deep convictions and commitments the church forms a powerful base for community organizing efforts,

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<sup>37</sup> Luke Bretherton points to the importance of listening for these organizations noting that in doing so they are able to generate a peculiar form of solidarity characteristic of the church. He states, "Listening enables genuine dispute and deliberation about what is the shared good in this place for these people at this time as against the predetermination of what that good might consist of outside of via some theoretical construction or the refusal of the possibility of such a shared good within the interest-based politics of either liberalism or identity politics." Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 101.



providing it with a unique ethical alternative.<sup>38</sup> Justice and love, or peace and the good are not vague ideals for the church, but have real social anchors in the structuring practices of its worship culture, providing it with an ethic that contrasts and challenges the arrangements of society under the rebellious powers. Enacting its own social and political processes, the church presents a podium from which to offer an alternative way to make decisions and organize relations. Synchronized under the rule of Christ, the ethic of “new humanity” embodied in the church can also impact the world, causing waves and trends of change. Given that churches are the fabric of these IAF organizations, congregation-based organizing can be understood as a way of congealing this missional activity and focusing its energy. Through community organizing, therefore, congregations engage in a more focused, potent, and enduring act of mission, challenging the normal operation of things under the powers and structures with new ethical options. They can do so because they are sufficiently apocalyptically shaped; because they grasp, as Yoder states, that “the first presupposition of *radical political action* is the conviction that a real God is really intervening in human affairs to set things right.”<sup>39</sup> Offering an independent and theologically informed alternative order, congregations are capable of challenging the wrongs intrinsic to the status quo with a divinely established critique and

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<sup>38</sup> Jacobsen makes the point that a strong sense of the world “as it should be” derived from a theologically attuned perspective is what guides the activity of congregation-based community organizing. Jacobsen, *Doing Justice*, 8-12. Some readers may think that I am too strongly playing up the role of congregations in community organizing. While it is my purpose to offer a theological interpretation of congregation-based community organizing and, therefore, my study is naturally inclined to foreground their involvement, in his own study Jeffrey Stout has observed that “...if one subtracted the churches from IAF and other similar organizing networks, then grassroots democracy in the United States would come to very little.” Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 4-5.

<sup>39</sup> Yoder, *War of the Lamb*, 77.

use their relational power to create accountability for those who benefit from keeping things the way they are.

That the convictions embodied in the practices of the church and articulated in its teachings stand at the heart of these community organizing efforts was illustrated in what would become the driving force of the “10% is Enough” campaign. As I have shown, having conducted its relational and house meetings, its forums and workshops researching the causes of the crisis, and having identified the wrongs adversely affecting its peoples’ lives, NC United Power brought together a group of theologians, clergy, and lay leaders to work on a theological paper reflecting on the economy. Over the course of several months during the spring and summer of 2009 they analyzed the issues, researched the problems, and studied the financial institutions and their industry. A series of working sessions, writing workshops, and discussions eventually produced a document that not only outlined the source of the problem and the limits of the government’s solutions but also offered a “faith perspective on responding to the crisis.”<sup>40</sup> Drawing from Christian practice and biblical teaching, it challenged the current structure of economic and social relations and called for drastic change and for corporate and political accountability. In doing so, the paper gave a theological description to the antics of the finance industry, defining them as a sin, namely, the sin of *usury*.

The substance of the paper provided a renewed vision for an economic recovery, drawn not first and foremost from government policies or economic theories of the free

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<sup>40</sup> See North Carolina United Power/ North Carolina Industrial Areas Foundation, “Theological Reflection on the Economy: A Working Paper for North Carolina United Power/ North Carolina Industrial Areas Foundation from an Interchange Among Theological Educators” (Charlotte, NC: N.C. United Power, July 2009).

market, but from a view of just relations originating from the church and articulated in the scriptures. In contrast to the usurious practices of finance, the paper presented an economy of grace, forgiveness, and mutual provision that aimed to help people in difficult times rather than to take advantage of their circumstances. Presenting a theological alternative, the paper embarked from the Lord's Prayer as given in Matthew 6, taking as the base of its argument the request for God to "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (v.12). A prayer routinely prayed by these churches and central to their worship life, the paper continued in the rhythm of the liturgy to illustrate how this forgiveness was both pre-imaged in the Deuteronomic code of Israel stating that "there shall be no need among you" (Deut. 15:4) and actualized, according to Acts 4:34, in the early church community.<sup>41</sup> Arguing for an alternative socio-economic order consonant with the reign of God, the paper focused on the practice of Jubilee embodied in the celebration of the table. Explaining this basic theological commitment, the paper asserted, "The Year of Release, also called the Jubilee, offered a new beginning, a second chance, and a path to keep the entire economy flourishing for the long term."<sup>42</sup> A different pattern for social and economic relations was possible through forgiveness and mutual provision set out in Jubilee, it averred, offering a real way to deal with the insurmountable debt and individual devastation engendered by the economic structures that had created the crisis.

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<sup>41</sup> The fact that the worship life of these congregations is an essential base for the activities of community organizing has been observed by Richard Wood, who states that "biblical stories, songs of faith, the preached word, and religious symbols help participants articulate why they do the work of organizing, thus helping generate meaning, motivation, and solidarity in the organizing process." Wood, *Faith in Action*, 180.

<sup>42</sup> NC United Power/ NC IAF, "Theological Reflection on the Economy," 3-4.

As a means of restructuring the temporal life of our society, it suggested, “the Lord’s Prayer” and the practice of eating together at the table “[make] it plain that the Jubilee formula is the norm—we must forgive our debtors.”<sup>43</sup> Informed by the new pattern of social relations consonant with the reign of God and learned through the practice of prayer and the table, these churches could begin to discover new alternatives characterized by mutual provision and shared resources instead of profiteering and exploitation.<sup>44</sup> Working from these basic theological principles and commitments, these theologians and church leaders argued, “Justice entails finding ways to make it possible for all who become impoverished to recover from an economic crisis,” and offer real “hope” for the future. If, as was communicated in scripture and embodied in their worship, justice was the only true end of hope, the paper continued, “then God’s people must learn to share in the divine mission of hope for the downtrodden.”<sup>45</sup> As Reverend Claude Forehand, minister at First Baptist Kannapolis in Kannapolis, NC and member of the Charlotte area affiliate Helping Empower Local People (HELP), summarized, Jesus’ pronouncement of good news to the poor, of freedom for captives and the oppressed, and of healing in Luke 4 “is what we are called to do,” concluding that to pursue these ends is

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>44</sup> Individual self-interest, which is an important facet of community organizing and one of Alinsky’s most basic insights, is not absent here, for due to the pervasive nature of the economic crisis one thing that was increasingly becoming apparent was the widespread benefit a new economic structure might produce. But, as the innovations of Ed Chambers within the Alinsky model have shown, mere self-interest cannot produce the type of broad-based collective action necessary to embark upon such a project. Religious and theological values and commitments, however, provided a necessary glue to fill the gap between individual self-interest and broad, collective action. Hence, as Mark Warren notes, “To sustain people’s participation, something more than self-interest would be necessary. The new IAF approach did not reject self-interest as one critical basis for political action. But the IAF began to see the possibilities for religion to provide a set of value commitments to combine with practical self-interest.” Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 58.

<sup>45</sup> NC United Power/ NC IAF, “Theological Reflection on the Economy,” 5.

“doing God’s work.” As a community formed in gathered worship where the justice of God is embodied in the practice of the economics of forgiveness and mutual provision implicit to the table, the commitment to that justice and love also must be extended to the world as part of its mission.

Based as it is in the practice of the church, community organizing relies upon the critical independence offered by the church’s own sense of what justice and love mean in order to name injustice and sin and to offer an alternative direction forward for society. As Yoder puts it, “only a believing community with a ‘thick’ particular identity has something to say to whatever ‘public’ is ‘out there’ to address.”<sup>46</sup> Independence gives the church a vantage point from which to propose deeper critique than might be possible for those who gain their bearings solely from the state or the institutional structures of the economy. To this point the paper called for a turn away “from the way of selfish individualism and competition for status and conspicuous wealth,” and, as I will show below, the same message was articulated in a public press conference that kicked off the campaign. In contrast, it proposed a true path toward “economic justice,” demonstrated by “communities of faith... in the past and present” who displayed “practical ways to put it into practice.”<sup>47</sup> As the theological paper on the economy illustrates, the alternative order embodied in the worship of the church allowed these community organizations to name the lending practices, excessive rates, dishonest instruments, and rapid foreclosures of the financial industry as usurious. And it provided a different option to the remedies

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<sup>46</sup> Yoder, *For the Nations*, 42.

<sup>47</sup> NC United Power/ NC IAF, “Theological Reflection on Economy,” 7.

for the crisis proposed by elites, denouncing their lopsided and quick fixes as not merely unfavorable, but worthy of “divine judgment.”<sup>48</sup> From a position of ethical and political independence, that is to say, congregations infused organizing efforts with a formidable critique of the operations of finance and were able to reference the structuring practices of their own culture as a witness to how things might be different. At the same time, they also were redefining democratic involvement by introducing their own process of political judgment guided by and synchronized to a higher good.<sup>49</sup>

The independent and unique sense of justice and love produced within the worship life of faith communities formed the basis of the mobilizing culture directed toward holding officials and elites accountable while proposing for public consideration predatory practices that precipitated the crisis and those executives and politicians collaborating to engineer an economic recovery based on even more usurious instruments, NC United Power along with twenty four other networks affiliated with IAF in the United States and the United Kingdom held a joint press conference on July 22, 2009 to publicize their grievances. The press conference officially kicked off the “10% Is Enough” campaign, the collaborative effort between these networks mentioned above,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>49</sup> Yoder reminds us that Christians will resist any enchantment with democracy that tends to overly associate it with the instantiation of salvation. As a form of the state, so he argues, it is not really all that different from others. What matters is what it is aimed toward, a point that actually positions the church to use it differently not by taking over, as we saw in the last chapter, but by reinventing and recasting it from the bottom up. See Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, 26-7. Luke Bretherton suggests something similar when he notes that “Theologically, the relationship between community organizing and worship ensures that the church is free to testify that the world is not its own; it is dependent on God rather than sustained by political and economic process.” Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 97. The critical distinction between Yoder and Bretherton, as I understand them, is that Yoder remains situated within a more apocalyptic perspective. Thus, for Yoder, when faithful to Christ’s rule, the church is the real presence, the real foretaste of creaturely existence restored to life under God’s reign.

aimed at capping all interest rates through the institution of usury laws. Calling for change and for accountability as part of this press conference, Reverend Lawrence Womack, associate priest at St. Martin's—the congregation that was soon to erupt in the conflict described in the introduction, charged the bank executives and financial institutions to “release the stranglehold that they have on our people and ask no more than the Lord of heaven requires of all of us.”<sup>50</sup> Dr. Andrew Mbuvi, one of the theologians who worked on the theological paper, gave expression to the alternative described in scripture and practiced in the church, saying, “We must affirm the interdependence of creation and humanity's divine imperative to share with one another.” Drawing from the Old Testament notion of the ten percent tithe, Reverend John Heinemeyer concluded his remarks by affirming the organization's position, declaring, “We say 10 percent interest is more than enough. We'll settle for less.”<sup>51</sup> As the initial activity of the campaign, the press conference served as a pulpit and platform for a public theological critique of the finance industry based upon the convictions articulated in the “Theological Reflection Paper” and to begin to call those directing, participating in, and collaborating with this industry to accountability. Furthermore, it put forth a new theologically-informed alternative for public consideration.

Beyond simply producing citizens capable of governing themselves, CBCOs invigorate politics by changing the entire nature of what it means to be politically active. Based on the convictions of those formed in the new political subjectivity of the church,

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<sup>50</sup> Jesse James DeConto, “Activists tell banks, other lenders: 10 percent is enough,” *News and Observer*, July 23, 2009 (Modified 22 Sept. 2009), accessed online: <http://www.newsobserver.com/2009/07/23/67817/activists-tell-banks-other-lenders.html>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

as can be seen in the work of NC United Power, community organizing reconfigures the democratic process. The pattern of social relations and the social processes of the church become through the vehicle of community organizing a witness and service for leading society forward and redefining democratic action. As political subjects trained in the social processes of the reign of God, Christians active in community organizing interface with the world by extending the convictions and commitments implicit to the structuring practices of their own culture as an alternative for society.<sup>52</sup> As part of the rule of Christ, naming the imbalances and injustices of society from the critical perspective of the reign of God is a crucial aspect of beginning to address and resolve these wrongs. Furthermore, by taking the initiative to articulate an alternative option developed in resonance to the forgiveness and mutual provision of the reign of God, NC United Power acted in radical hope, trusting that the theological convictions and commitments of their churches had something to offer in a time of crisis for reconfiguring economic relations more justly.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> The active nature of community organizing, to this extent, grows out of the dynamic nature of the political life of the church itself. As Ed Chambers notes, “broad-based organizing is a process for creating social capital and keeping it in motion.” And much like the internal structure of the church itself, its activity is the exercise of a particular power manifest in an ongoing process. As he notes, “that power is rooted in meanings, values, social knowledge, and relationships that hold such groups together in a community of common interest. Social capital is the shared ‘wealth’ of the body politic... Kept in motion, organized talent, energy, and power generated social capital.” Chambers, *Roots for Radicals*, 69. Drawing off the process of binding and loosing, community organizing also cultivates a communal practical rationality manifest in a similar process of active engagement.

<sup>53</sup> As Stout recognizes, “If you asked these people to check their religious commitments and deepest concerns at the door, on their way into the public arena, they wouldn’t know how to do that. The separation of church and state does not go through the heart of the believer.” Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, 197. Even more, I think, congregants engaged in these efforts do not simply assume that there may be a little bit of overlap between the social manifestation of their faith commitments and a larger societal good, but that the social embodiment of their faith commitments provide a real resource for critiquing societal structures and reconfiguring these arrangements.



### *Internal Conflict and Resolution*

The press conference created a stir and it is within the context of that tension that the conflict at St. Martin's described in the introduction to this study emerged. Following the press conference, NC United Power began to distribute the theological paper, offering it as a discussion piece both for its own member congregations and the over 1000 congregations throughout the IAF network. At the same time, NC United Power asked clergy to preach on the topic of usury, aiming to generate over 500 sermons focused on the justice concerns articulated within the paper. As part of this process, the organization also hosted a statewide clergy meeting in August in which they engaged the components of the paper and invited discussion. The idea was to have ministers do the same in their congregations, knowing that this would open up conversation and provoke conflict.

The theological paper on the economy and its challenge of usury, as NC United Power leaders anticipated, was not received with overwhelming excitement by all of its member churches. Indeed, as Gerald Taylor put it, the paper instigated "a real crisis in the temple," bringing to the surface the fact that "there are real tensions around economic questions in congregations." The conflict at St. Martin's offered one illustration of the tensions generated by the paper, as the charge of usury spurred sharp exchanges between congregants and among clergy. Recounting further the confrontations the paper and the campaign generated, Taylor noted that, "[it] raised a whole set of questions about what we teach in the church and what we teach in our faith traditions about [money and

economics].”<sup>54</sup> Engaging the document together, particularly white churches like St. Martin’s found its theme to be contentious.<sup>55</sup> The effort against usury challenged congregants to consider the cultural pressures upon them, and to weigh what convictions were primarily shaping them and claiming their fealty. To this extent, the paper prompted a thorough and deep consideration of what commitments held ascendancy over parishioners’ lives and actions. Within the congregation of St. Martin’s, I described at the outset of this study, the tensions created by the paper came to a boiling point, and it was at this time that Reverend Murdoch Smith asked Taylor to meet with his people.

Though it may seem counterintuitive, much of the point of the paper and of the campaign against usurious practices was to generate such conflicts. Indeed, CBCOs view conflicts as healthy and as an integral part of their organizing process. Like the role of conflict in the ecclesial process of binding and loosing, CBCOs recognize that engaging conflict can be good because it allows them to focus attention on an issue and to discern more intently how to resolve it while taking wrongs seriously. Just as it is essential to the political judgment of the ongoing life of the church to personally engage the conflicts that

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<sup>54</sup> Within the context of his comments on the conflicts and tensions that emerged within the church, Taylor also noted the fact that from his experience the tension was much stronger within white churches, where the economic sphere seemed to enjoy a more ardent independence from the theological or ecclesial realm. Taylor’s observations continue to draw attention to the intimate connections between poverty and economic exploitation and race, an issue that remains deeply entrenched within this country and one that continues to mar the Christian sacrament of baptism.

<sup>55</sup> My own congregation, Emmaus Way in Durham, NC became immersed in similar discussions and conflicts about the role of the church in economic reform, especially surrounding the notion of capping interest rates. Some of our folks felt that capping interest rates would actually hurt the poor, as they would not be able to borrow from banks no longer interested in taking the risk on their loans with lower rates of return. On the other hand, some of our folks, including me, argued for the need to curb practices we perceived to be usurious even if it meant the reconfiguration of banking and finance as we know it. Indeed, our congregation’s pub group engaged in many debates about this issue, and two of our people even started a blog together to further the conversation even though they did not agree with one another exactly.

arise within it, as this is the way it discerns moral questions and pursues reconciliation,<sup>56</sup> CBCOs also recognize that the route to the harmony of justice must proceed through conflict. As an extension of the process of binding and loosing, instead of running away from conflict and attempting to avoid it, Taylor's engagement with the members of St Martin's illustrates the power of this process at work within an organization of churches. The conflict at St. Martin's also offers an example of the process of binding and loosing at work in this form of organizing. Within the course of the Saturday meetings he conducted with these congregants, specific offenses and issues were addressed, time was given for each member to speak, and eventually, those with specific skills and talents were tapped to lead the effort of generating a creative resolution, offering the possibility of universal principal reduction and the introduction of shared-appreciation mortgages.

Like churches enjoined to embody the new humanity of Jesus, IAF organizations recognize that human beings have differences and that conflicts often emerge as a result of these differences. They are profoundly realistic. But because they are deeply rooted in the church, these community organizations also grasp that they are not bereft of a positive means of processing these conflicts and thereby generating new and stronger collectivities committed to shared resolutions. While realistic, they are no less radical. Conflict is central to IAF organizing because it is often the precursor to building true civic friendships such as the one that was to emerge between Jim Hughes and Phyllis Craig-Taylor as a result of the meetings at St. Martin's.<sup>57</sup> As Mark Warren observes, in

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<sup>56</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 78.

contrast to other understandings of democracy that tend to think of human interests and differences as always in complete contest, “the IAF quite explicitly rejects the notion that these interests are in permanent conflict. Instead, it seeks to structure a process in which a diverse group of participants can find a commonality of interests and an understanding of the common good.”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, as can be seen in the work of NC United Power, the substance of these conflicts and the arguments surrounding them are not disconnected from the faith commitments, ethical convictions, and sacramental practices of these believing communities. Thus, by taking their commitments seriously and by giving them a public voice, CBCOs pursue change by charging people to live into and embody the very standards and practices they embraced in their communal vows and in the structuring practices of their worship culture. Conflict is not the random exercise of adverse power, but the selective application of pressure aimed toward fashioning social relations more to accord with the sacred principles participants have voluntarily adopted. It is aimed at resynchronizing and harmonizing relations that have become disjointed or fallen out of pattern. In this way, conflict invites them to engage in a process of political judgment consistent with the form of life that resonates with the occurrence of Jesus and the tempo and rhythm of the reign of God.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 227.

<sup>59</sup> The central role of conflict was insight Alinsky understood early on and gave shape to his own style of organizing. As he states, “Conflict is the essential core of a free and open society. If one were to project the democratic way of life in the form of a musical score, its major theme would be the harmony of dissonance.” Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 62. While Alinsky tended to view the democratic process in and of itself with a sense of faith, the critical distinction I want to make is that congregations do not place their faith in democracy but in the prayerful process of the rule of Christ, and this, in fact, is what can make a more just democracy possible.

Transformation is not easy, for in any community there are always competing pressures that attempt to tilt things toward their own interest. As Alinsky reminds us, “Change means movement. Movement means friction.”<sup>60</sup> But this friction, when channeled into the proper procedure, can also contribute vital heat to the building of a more just and peaceful society. In the same way that congregations work through conflict, trusting the Spirit to lead them to conclusions about how they are to embody God’s love in a particular context, CBCOs rely on this same mode of political judgment and conflict resolution to challenge unjust arrangements and to work for change trusting God will show up in this mission. Working in this way, CBCOs rely on sacramental practices and processes, extending and extrapolating them, to make real social and political changes.

#### *New Solution and New Confrontation*

The episode at St. Martin’s was not the end of the story. In fact, it was really only the beginning, and the agreement reached in this series of discussions would become the focal piece of a number of larger actions. A document drafted by ex-executive of what is now Wells Fargo/Wachovia and member of St Martin’s Jim Hughes and Charlotte School of Law professor and expert on property rights Phyllis Craig-Taylor outlined a plan for principal reduction and shared-appreciation mortgages. The stated goal of the proposal was to “Offer an alternative for restructuring problem loans in a way that assists the home

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 21.

owner while improving the lender's position."<sup>61</sup> It was the first and only solution of its kind put forth at the time, drafted by two individuals who had developed a friendship through the conversations at the church. Subsequently, their proposal was to be presented to Wells Fargo/ Wachovia and Bank of America with the intention of sparking discussion around and reform of foreclosure procedures. However, with the banks obstinately resistant to entertaining any proposal that challenged their own ideas of how to move forward, by the fall of 2009 NC United Power recognized that it was time to conduct a collective action. To this end, a rally was planned for early October to gather congregations from across the state in Charlotte in order to protest lending practices and foreclosures, followed by a march on the headquarters of Bank of America and Wells Fargo/ Wachovia to deliver the proposal. The aim of this stunt was to pressure bank executives to open discussions with the clergy and leaders of NC United Power on an "agenda for economic relief."<sup>62</sup> Having worked through conflict within their own institutions and churches, such as St. Martin's, to reach a new resolution, the attempt was to initiate another conflict with these financial institutions, extending and extrapolating the process into the wider layers of civil society and politics.

The march was a tactical exercise of political power, mobilizing the commitments of these congregants in challenge to bankers and officials who thought they could continue to operate above accountability. The stated aim of this action, as Gerald Taylor

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<sup>61</sup> NC United Power, "Strategy for Restructuring Portfolio Problem First Deed of Trust Loans," Internal Document (September 2009).

<sup>62</sup> Jesse James DeConto, "Faithful fight high interest," *News and Observer*, October 2, 2009, accessed online: <http://www.newsobserver.com/2009/10/02/121885/faithful-fight-high-interest.html>

explained it, “was to force them to give us a meeting.”<sup>63</sup> Both Bank of America and Wells Fargo/Wachovia, the global headquarters of the former being in Charlotte along with the regional headquarters of the latter, had until this point refused to meet with NC United Power and IAF leaders. Expressing his frustration at the banks’ indifference, Tom Moore, a builder from Lexington, NC who had seen his credit-card rate jump to twenty-nine percent, said, “It goes against the whole democratic process. We don’t have any voice, and it affects us.”<sup>64</sup> Echoing Moore’s comments and voicing her own frustrations, Melinda Graham, another Lexington, NC resident attending the march, said, “You feel helpless because there’s nothing you can do.” She had spent the past four years paying down \$3,000 of credit card debt, only to see her rate spike to twenty-four percent on the remaining \$5,000 she owed. Paying over \$100 per month in interest and fees, Graham was desperate to gain a hearing from her credit-card company, saying, “Hopefully, this [campaign] makes a difference.”<sup>65</sup> Having reached out to executives of the two institutions only to be ignored and turned away, NC United Power’s action gathered over five hundred North Carolinians to rally in opposition to the destructive practices of the banks and to try to pressure them to listen.<sup>66</sup> Creating a public drama focusing attention

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<sup>63</sup> Describing what IAF organization mean by “an action,” Ed Chambers states that it is “a public meeting of leaders of a broad-based organization with political, business, or other officials for the purpose of being recognized and getting them to act on specific proposals put forward by the organization.” Chambers, *Roots for Radicals*, 80. By creating conflict, these events generate the type of accountability necessary to effect political change and as a result they include confrontation and negotiation (81-2). With regard to the instance I describe above, because bank officials were unwilling to recognize or meet with N.C. United Power’s leaders, the action was taken to them through a demonstration at their offices.

<sup>64</sup> DeConto, “Forgive Us Our Debts,” 38.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 18, and Jesse James DeConto, “Minister’s crusade to reduce interest rates, debt,” in *News and Observer*, March 14, 2010, accessed online at: <http://www.newsobserver.com/2010/03/14/388301/ministers-crusade-to-reduce-interest.html>

<sup>66</sup> A video of this action is available online at: [http://www.iafsoutheast.com/i\\_media.html](http://www.iafsoutheast.com/i_media.html)

on this conflict, the idea was to mobilize the relational power of these congregations to confront the banks, placing their convictions in public contrast to the operations of financial institutions with the objective of getting them to come to the table to meet.<sup>67</sup>

In preparation the organization held a worship service that aimed to reify the theological convictions of the participants and to invigorate its power base. Amassed in the sanctuary of the Greater Mt. Moriah Primitive Baptist Church on West Trade St. in Charlotte, NC in preparation for the action, they began by singing, praying, and listening to a sermon. Reaffirming the hope that guided this campaign, the sermon served to frame their protest with a proclamation of God's desire for human relations and for just distribution of resources and just procedures in addressing wrongs. For those gathered there, the point was clear. The disjointed and imbalanced actions of the banks and government officials went against the justice of God's reign. "People are crying out for a solution," proclaimed Shaw Divinity School professor Dr. Mikael Broadway preaching from Deuteronomy 15:1-11 and Acts 4: 31-35.<sup>68</sup> Using the passages to call attention to the injustices of lending practices, which he declared had reached "loan-shark heights", Broadway then outlined the lopsided nature of the response to the crisis which was contributing to the growing disparity between the nation's rich and poor through an alarming rate of the transfer of wealth from the latter to the former. In contrast, he

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<sup>67</sup> Richard Wood also points to the way in which IAF organizations intentionally raise the level of tension with officials and business executives when they think these individuals or corporations refuse to respect or acknowledge their claims for accountability. Furthermore, because of their deep roots in congregations, these organizations are able to generate and maintain such levels of tension because they are able to articulate this confrontation within the traditions and theological values and commitments of these communities. Wood, *Faith in Action*, 49.

<sup>68</sup> Mikael Broadway, "Open Hearts Mean Open Hands," a sermon preached on October 2, 2009 at Greater Mount Moriah Primitive Baptist Church, Charlotte, N. C.



reminded the congregation of their hope, declaring, “But this is not the kind of economic system intended for the world that God loves.” Further denouncing bank practices and government collusion, he proclaimed, “An economic system which exploits and uses the average worker so that a wealthy elite can become richer and richer has turned away from the ways of God.” Even more, he noted, this disparity grows on the back of financial instruments that bleed the poor, trapping them in a form of economic slavery. For this activity, he reminded them, the Bible has a name: “usury,” a term, he noted, that seems to be lost in current discourse, but which “by biblical standards...is one of the worst forms of sin.” The sermon, by emphasizing and expounding the commitments and convictions of the church, powerfully reiterated the sinful nature of the acts they were opposing, calling attention to the way that these institutions and their leaders were operating in opposition to the will of God.<sup>69</sup>

While making completely clear that each individual must reassess her desires and spending habits, expressing the purpose of the assembly Broadway nonetheless declared, it is time for the people to put a stop to these injustices. “A reckoning has come,” Broadway proclaimed. “Durham CAN and other organizations like ours, in Charlotte, Winston-Salem, Boston, Washington, DC, New York City, Atlanta, Chicago, and London, England, have decided that it is time to take a stand against usury.”

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<sup>69</sup> According to Ed Chambers, creating such tension is absolutely critical to the work of congregation-based organizing, as it brings together knowledge, moral concern, and action. He notes, “the constant tension between the world as it is and the world as it should be is the primary motivation leading people... to seek common good. What I mean by saying moral or ethical is stepping up to the tension between the two worlds... understanding the world as it is while ignoring the world as it should be leads to cynicism, division, and coercion. Concern for the world as it should be divorced from the capacity for analysis and action in the world as it is marginalizes and sentimentalizes morality and ethics.” Chambers, *Roots for Radicals*, 24.

Reconfiguration of the economy was needed, a return to justice in lending was necessary. Articulating the perspective of a new political subjectivity, the way forward in this situation, he stated, was to seek “repentance and resolution” as is practiced in the celebration of Jubilee recapitulated in the Sabbatical basis of the Jewish Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In hopeful anticipation of the possibilities that could emerge from addressing these wrongs, Broadway preached, God’s grace can bring “a transformation” both individually and to the community. “We are concerned about economic justice and the health of all people because Jesus came to save whole people, whole communities, the whole of creation.”<sup>70</sup> The sermon provided theological context and definition for the action and framed the larger effort by not only naming the problem as sin, but also offering an alternative vision derived from the new humanity of Jesus and giving hope and confidence that this new arrangement was possible. Locating the campaign within this theological register, then, provided a deeper—more apocalyptic—challenge that went beyond merely cosmetic adjustments. As subjects of the reign of God, they could envision a better arrangement and were called to pursue its actualization.

The mode of the action flowed from this theological disposition, trusting God would show up. As a tactic, the action made use of the tools available at hand in an exercise of nonviolent power to challenge the unchecked sway of finance.<sup>71</sup> By marching

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<sup>70</sup> Broadway, “Open Hearts Mean Open Hands.”

<sup>71</sup> In contrast to what many may see as an oxymoron, Yoder thinks that there are several kinds of power that are not intrinsically violent. Therefore, there are forms of “nonviolent action” that rely upon “modes of activism that renounce violence, in order that other kinds of power (truth, consent, conscience) may work.” Yoder, *War of the Lamb*, 85. Adamantly committed to nonviolence, IAF organizing is nonetheless focused on the exercise of alternative modes of power that often make use of tactical maneuvers.

from the church to the downtown offices of Bank of America and Wells Fargo/Wachovia and by hosting a public demonstration and conference outside, the organization made a public display of the banks' unwillingness to engage in conversations. Additionally, in an act of "political jujitsu" so characteristic of IAF organizations, those participants that held accounts at each of these banks began to enter with the goal of tying up teller lines and disrupting bank operations.<sup>72</sup> Utterly resistant to this activity, bank officials in a flex of their muscle exposed their disconnection from the desires of their clientele by instructing bank security to block their own account holders out of the bank. As a result of such confusion, the Wells Fargo/ Wachovia main branch in downtown Charlotte closed its doors for the day, abruptly halting its walk-in operations. While security at Bank of America attempted to sequester protesters by forcing them to remain within a contained area in the bank, account holders disturbed normal procedures by singing and praying together in the foyer. In the end, such tactics worked, as eventually, bank executives agreed to meet with clergy and leaders of NC United Power. As a public action, it forced the banks to acknowledge the conflict and, as Gerald Taylor put it, "set the terms of the fight."

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<sup>72</sup> That the generation of power is the goal of community organizing is prominently emphasized by Alinsky, as it is the generation of power, he notes, for the purpose of being "used and applied in the pursuit of a specific program" that is the whole reason for organizing. Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*, 54. And yet, the mode of this power is itself peculiar, taking the form of "tactics" by "doing what you can with what you have." Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 126. Because IAF organizations are not institutions tied to the power structure of a society, but instead remain independent, they do not possess a strategic high ground from which to exercise their own power. Hence, they make use of a "mass jujitsu, utilizing the power of one part of the power structure against another part" (148), or wherein they "yield in such planned and skilled ways that the superior strength of the Haves becomes their own undoing" (152). Speaking of this concept of "political jujitsu," Luke Bretherton notes that, as a shrewd exercise of counterforce, its aim is the "opening up of a new space for new ways of relating or addressing an issue, ways that reconfigure the unjust status quo." Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 79.

Through the use of such tactics, the idea was not to take over or to gain control of a business or a political body, displacing executives or imposing a new structure through the demolition of the old. Community organizing does not attempt to form a new politic outside of the current order and then to challenge the existing order with this self-contained substitute. Instead, as I have argued, it is a process of internal transformation, operating within these structures to disrupt, reset, and rearrange their formation by making use of time. Like yeast, which works by infiltrating and filling the loaf in order to alter its characteristics, community organizing in concert with the mission of the church moves from inside out, working internally to renew and revitalize arrangements with love and justice. Disassembling the “wall of separation,” congregations engaged in these community organizing efforts interface with the larger society by extending and extrapolating the sacramental practices and processes of their worship, introducing the tempo and rhythm of their practices into wider realms. Congregation-based community organizing, therefore, functions as “a kind of mediation” wherein the church engages with the world in a way that both maintains its witness but also acts in real service. In Yoder’s terms, “this kind of ‘mediation’ is not a mental or verbal operation of translation or conceptual bridging, but rather the concrete historical presence, among their neighbors, of believers who for Jesus’ sake do ordinary social things differently..., [lending] themselves to being observed, imitated, and extrapolated” in the construction of a “real common agenda.”<sup>73</sup> Because its shape and mode remain commensurate with the “social

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<sup>73</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 74-5. Commenting elsewhere on the sober engagement of the church with the world, wherein, through patience and hope, the church remains critically discerning even as it is also open to collaboration with others, Yoder elaborates on this notion of a shared agenda. He states, “the

ethical witness” of the believing community, this type of community organizing is an avenue through which the church can faithfully function as an apocalyptic “instrument” of political renewal in the world.<sup>74</sup> By offering a renewed process for engaging conflicts and working for resolutions learned within their own adherence to the rule of Christ, the congregations involved in this type of community organizing work within the structures of society to powerfully challenge the status quo and to propose new social-economic arrangements.

But this is not to say that they always meet with immediate and complete success. With regard to the march on the banks, a degree of immediate success did result. Officials from both Bank of America and Wells Fargo/ Wachovia agreed to meet with leaders from NC United Power to discuss their proposals. And by late fall a few members of the Senate and some Senate hopefuls had announced their support for the larger campaign, as did Citigroup CEO Vikram Pandit who told the Boston Globe that “his company would support a cap on credit-card rates as long as it applied to every bank and if pre-existing accounts were exempt.”<sup>75</sup> The largest victory, however, emerged from a February 12, 2010 meeting with Bank of America, where executives agreed to honor the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) protection for active military families that

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transformation of the world will proceed sometimes through the conscious exercise of discerning light by believers, but also by others of good will, and even (despite themselves) by others of good will being providentially used, carrying out the imperatives and skills, of their vocations, i.e., those definable skills and goals of which the social organism is constituted.” Yoder, *For the Nations*, 214.

<sup>74</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 78.

<sup>75</sup> Jesse James DeConto, “Interest rate cap sought for plastic,” in *News and Observer*, November 28, 2009, accessed online: <http://www.newsobserver.com/2009/11/28/214072/interest-rate-cap-sought-for-plastic.html>

capped interest rates and prohibited foreclosure on them. Bank of America, as a result, decided to reduce mortgage rates on active and returning military to four percent, extending this rate for twelve months even after their return, and to set up a principal forgiveness and loan modification program for them.<sup>76</sup> To this extent, the actions of NC United Power in concert with other IAF affiliates around the nation, contributed to making significant change within the financial system. But these successes did not translate into immediate overall transformation. Indeed, the larger proposal offered by NC United Power including universal principal reduction for underwater home loans accompanied by new shared appreciation mortgages was resoundingly rejected by Bank of America, who refused NC United Power's suggestion that they take the lead on foreclosure reconciliation in return for strong IAF support.<sup>77</sup> The unique plan generated from that series of meetings at St. Martin's in Charlotte had been extended as an alternative way for these institutions to move forward, but at least at this point they turned it down.

The initial rejection of their plan by the financial institutions, however, was anticipated by IAF organizers and leaders of NC United Power. As Gerald Taylor put it, "The usury fight, we knew was going to be long term because it was undermining the very basic nature of how people think about credit... nobody expected that to be short

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<sup>76</sup> Bank of America Press Release, "Bank of America Introduces Program to Extend Mortgage Protections for Service Members Beyond Active Duty" (March 10, 2011).

<sup>77</sup> As Richard Wood notes, one critical component of organizing is the collection of vital info, both on the nature of the issues, as we saw above in relational meetings, but also with regard to proposing possible solutions. Recognizing the context and submitting real (if creative) solutions is an indelible aspect of good community organizing efforts. Wood, *Faith in Action*, 41. Indeed, as Mark Warren notes, some of the most serious failures he observed in his study of community organizing occurred when the organization opposed policy or current conventions but did not have any constructive ideas of its own to offer. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 55.

term.”<sup>78</sup> Following these discussions, therefore, leaders continued to dialogue with the banks in the hope that they would recognize the impact of the crisis on average citizens. At the same time, they initiated conversations with the North Carolina Attorney General and, in collaboration with the greater Metro IAF, the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG). Amidst what was becoming a nationwide epidemic, affecting one out of every 381 households in the country, and a swell of homeowners crying foul of bank foreclosure proceedings, NAAG began to pressure lenders, who had repossessed some 95,364 homes in August of 2010 and issued 338,838 foreclosure filings, to cease the process for the time being. In North Carolina, Attorney General Roy Cooper, responding to the request of NC United Power and others, asked Bank of America to halt all foreclosures until his team and the bank could be sure the documentation was correct and the proceedings were operating within the law.<sup>79</sup> Throughout the fall of 2010, as it was becoming increasingly clear that the banks had rushed thousands of mortgages toward foreclosure using “robo-signers” to fabricate illegitimate documents in mills across the country, the attorneys general armed with information and examples provided by IAF organizations such as NC United Power began investigating the banks feigned attempts at loan modification and the more serious charges arising from illegitimate paperwork needed to establish loan ownership.<sup>80</sup> Eventually, these proceedings would lead to a \$25

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<sup>78</sup> DeConto, “Interest rate cap sought for plastic.”

<sup>79</sup> Staff and wire reports of the Associated Press, “Bank of America is halting foreclosures across the US,” *Charlotte Observer*, October 8, 2010, accessed online: <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2010/10/08/1747554/bofa-to-halt-us-foreclosures.html>

<sup>80</sup> Rick Rothacker, “Banks are pressed on foreclosure,” *Charlotte Observer*, November 17, 2010, accessed online: <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2010/11/17/v-print/1843586/banks-are-pressed-on-foreclosure.html>

billion national agreement brokered by NAAG with the five largest banks to provide relief for troubled home owners.<sup>81</sup> The patient consistent work of these organizations and their congregations was giving rise to some transformation.<sup>82</sup>

### *Failures and Withdraw*

Beyond some minor frustrations, the organizing effort around the economic crisis also experienced some larger failures. First, indicative of the church's confusion on such economic and political issues and the prevalence of class prejudices within its fold, several church leaders of mainly white, affluent congregations, citing their lack of expertise in economic theory, chose to defer to financiers and economic analysts to devise the best plan for rectifying these grave inequalities and curbing the abuse of the system. In essence, these ministers withdrew their support for the campaign due to their unwillingness to press the issue of usury. One example of this occurred in Charlotte, when the minister of the prominent Myers Park United Methodist Church decided to concede to the bankers within his congregation to offer what they thought were workable solutions to the problems in the economy. When asked by the leaders and clergy of NC United Power to lean on the bankers in his wealthy Charlotte congregation, the Reverend James Howell, instead, chose to side with the financiers, trusting that their spirit of

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<sup>81</sup> The Associated Press, "\$25B mortgage settlement with banks is official," *USA Today*, March 12, 2012, accessed online: <http://www.usatoday.com/money/economy/housing/story/2012-03-12/mortgage-settlement/53502706/1>

<sup>82</sup> In her own study, Heidi Swarts suggests, "Perhaps the most distinctive element that religion imparts to activism is religious faith itself: the strength it provides for risk taking and the capacity for endurance over the long run." Swarts, *Organizing Urban America*, 11. What she seems to be straining to say, but nonetheless cannot say as a sociologist, is that religious faith is elemental to the formation of new political subjects.



“generous posture toward the poor” and “solid church membership” would prompt them to offer sound advice without the need for confrontation or deeper discussion.<sup>83</sup> Others would follow this same path, recusing themselves from any theological critique of the banking industry and its underlying economic structure, effectively, cutting off or truncating the process of conflict resolution.

In similar fashion, while the banks have at times come to the table, they have perpetually enjoyed the power to remain fairly aloof to most of the challenges posed by the campaign. No interest rate cap has been established and no universal program for foreclosure has been constructed. While these congregations and organizations have been able to generate a considerable amount of accountability, high level bankers and their multinational institutions remain relatively free to operate beyond the reach of these attempts to hold them responsible. Hence, while promising activities have emerged, no thoroughgoing means of accountability has yet been generated, allowing these institutions to continue to ignore proposals and alternatives suggested.

Finally, much of the failure to hold elites of finance accountable is due to the fact that no real political will has existed within legislating bodies to pursue them or rein them in. To this extent, the deal reached between the banks and NAAG is a perfect example. While leaders of NC United Power along with the greater Metro IAF had been involved in conversations that were instrumental to the case the attorneys general were leveraging against the banks, what became evident in a meeting in the fall of 2011 with the staff of

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<sup>83</sup> James Howell, “For the Poor, Against ‘10% is Enough,’” Duke Divinity School’s Faith and Leadership *Call and Response* (blog), February 28, 2010, accessed July 8, 2011, <http://www.faithandleadership.com/node/1235>

North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper, was that the negotiations between the big five banks and the attorneys general were becoming more and more secretive. Excluded from these negotiations and without recourse to offer any opinion on the deal that was being worked out, members of NC United Power's economic team were not surprised when the details of the soft resolution of the agreement began to emerge. Clearly the banks had once again gotten off easy, the main explanation appearing to be that with elections pending few legislators and public officials were really interested in taking on these giant campaign contributors. Political will remained, and continues to be, largely determined by these economic powers.

### *The Process Continues*

The goal of a more thorough transformation of the financial industry, obviously, has not yet been achieved. So, the work of NC United Power and Metro IAF has continued. To date, a renewed effort, spurred by Guilford County's register of deeds, Jeff Thigpen, who conducted an audit of foreclosure files in his county resulting in the discovery of 4,500 fraudulently signed documents,<sup>84</sup> is being piloted by NC United Power affiliates across the state. As a point of leverage emerging in the wake of a CBS *60 Minutes* special on the activity of robo-signing and featuring the operations of one "mortgage mill" called Docx,<sup>85</sup> local organizations are currently performing their own

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<sup>84</sup> The results of Thigpen's audit were reported in Rick Rothacker and Lisa Hammersly, "Protesters will target Bank of America loan issues," *Charlotte Observer*, May 11, 2011, accessed online: <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2011/05/11/v-print/2287367/protesters-will-target-bank-of-america-loan-issues.html>

<sup>85</sup> This episode of *60 Minutes* aired on CBS on April 4, 2011.

audits of foreclosure files in their respective counties with the aim of generating a new crisis surrounding these documents. The hope is that if they can accumulate a significant number of documents bearing fraudulent signatures, then they will be able to question the legitimacy of foreclosures in order to restart negotiations with policy makers. Because the issues remain unresolved for the vast numbers of people who fill their pews, the organization has not given up on the process of seeking real resolution.

In this vein, NC United Power in collaboration with Metro IAF continues to patiently work to address one issue at a time, even as it remains fixed on continuing to pursue its larger challenge of predatory lending, usury, and the dominant structure of the finance industry. With this larger vision of reform in front of them, because of their deep commitments and shared ethic, they continue to pursue this vision not only with power but a power disciplined with patience and hope. In doing so, they offer a concrete and material instance of the mission of the church in witness and service to the world, creatively and cleverly looking to rearrange the configuration of things and to enact a form of life whose social relations embody more the love and justice of God. Infused by faith, at the same time, they pursue these objectives with hope, eagerly anticipating that God will show up.

### *Conclusion*

The work of NC United Power, as representative of the work of congregation-based community organizing in general, presents a powerful example of the political possibilities opened up by apocalyptically hopeful political subjects. In grassroots

organizing they discover a unique vehicle for missional interface with the world, extending and extrapolating the reign of God and the rule of Christ outward. “At their best,” Richard Wood has observed, “faith-based federations embody in their own organizations and, through their work in congregations and other institutions, extend to the wider political culture a particular model of public engagement that integrates the political exigencies of effective organizing and an ethical vision rooted in religious practice and relational ties.”<sup>86</sup> As those shaped within the particular form of life of the worship of the church, congregation-based organizing provides a method of political action through which the unique qualities of this form of life can be directed toward structural change.<sup>87</sup> Thus, while not yet ultimately successful and while continuing to face difficult challenges, the particular ethical origin of congregation-based community organizing imbues it with hope, believing that a new way can be found and that God will

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<sup>86</sup> Wood, *Faith in Action*, 193.

<sup>87</sup> Luke Bretherton observes that “Community organizing as a form of democratic politics is a mode of action in which those charged with bearing witness to the Gospel do three things simultaneously: first, they act defensively to uphold or forge anew an institutional plurality that serves as a bulwark against the totalizing thrust of modern forms of economic and political power; second, they hold to account governing authorities so as to enable right or fit judgments to be made through a meaningful process of consultation and deliberation; and third, they act constructively, by forging public friendships and enabling the discernment of goods in common that form the basis of an earthly peace in which all, including Christians, may find their welfare. In short, it is a way for churches to relate acts of political judgment and realize obligations of neighbor love in the public sphere.” Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 94. I tend to agree with much of what Bretherton states in this passage, but what I have tried to show, and what remains the difference between his view of congregation-based community organizing and my own is that I understand the peace of the church itself to be an ongoing, social process resonant with a distinct time. Whereas Bretherton tends to view the peace of God (as consistent with his Augustinian perspective) as a static condition whose eschatological fulfillment can only be faintly enacted within history, I follow Yoder more closely to the conclusion that the church is a distinct culture and society based in its unique experience of time. The heart of the difference being that while Bretherton follows Augustine in viewing the two cities inhabiting the same neutral (secular) time whose divergent points of inflection can only be known to God, I stress with Yoder the distinction between the two ages. Bretherton remains more devoted to the geometric representation of time implicit to Augustine’s view of human history while Yoder tends to rely more on a dynamic sense of time—time determined by its content. Thus, because the church is determined by the content of the reign of God, while it never claims a unique and distinct territory or geographical location, it does possess a unique experience of time, which it then offers to the world.

show up. As a result, they can resist the despair and skepticism that tends to pervade liberal theories of democracy, finding instead a mode of hopeful engagement that is both faithful and effective.<sup>88</sup> As Ed Chambers puts it, “IAF organizations are founded on and cultivate the virtue of hope, because their leaders and organizers understand that as people’s hope for a meaningful life ebbs, the tide of nihilistic despair rises.”<sup>89</sup> It is, I have argued, the theological basis and configuration of this hope that allows IAF organizations to spring up in places where all other possibilities have failed.

Congregation-based community organizing, as an alternative to despair or apathy, furthermore, is also deeply material. Its hope resides in the possibility of concrete conflict resolution and the reconfiguration of social and economic relations first enjoyed in the worship life of the believing community. Extending the practice of these relations and especially relying on the process of binding and loosing to resolve conflicts, congregation-based organizations aim to make real changes in physical, economic, and social lives of their constituents. As I have illustrated, NC United Power embarked on a campaign to reform the financial system and to refashion lending practices, home purchases, and corporate accountability based upon the theological convictions

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<sup>88</sup> As noted in the introduction, Jeffrey Stout’s most recent study is one example of the proclivity to pessimism prevalent among liberals. Of course, Stout’s entire corpus bears the marks of this reticence but it is all the more pronounced in the final pages of *Blessed Are the Organized*. In conclusion to this study, Stout states, “I do want to claim... that the imbalance of power between ruling elites and ordinary citizens is the principal cause of democracy’s current ills and that it can be set straight only if broad-based organizing is scaled up significantly, only if it extends its reach much more widely throughout American society than it has to date.” He continues, “The imbalance of power between ordinary citizens and the new ruling class has, in my view, reached crisis proportions. The crisis will not be resolved happily *unless* many more institutions and communities commit themselves to getting democratically organized and *unless* effective publics of accountability are constructed at many levels of social complexity. Of this I have no doubt. Whether these conditions will be fulfilled is very doubtful indeed, in roughly the way that all collaborative undertakings of great social import are doubtful.” *Blessed Are the Organized*, 286-87.

<sup>89</sup> Chambers, *Roots for Radicals*, 38.

articulated in the discussions that surrounded the theological reflection on the economy. An avenue for the concrete material mission of the church, community organizing resists instrumentalizing the worship of the church for other purposes because it continues to rely upon the theological articulation of these material reforms to support and shape its objectives.<sup>90</sup> While reliant on a sacramental practice, it remains deeply realistic and engaged in extending these real social processes out to the world. Not only does this provide vital energy for the ongoing work of transforming society, but it also reinvigorates congregations with a tangible sense of their mission in the world. Symbiotically, this form of missional engagement also strengthens and renews the worship life of these communities, as participation in organizing can help to draw a congregation out of individualism, sectarianism, and disembodied worship and help it to reskill it in the kingdom practices of conflict resolution, new relations, and economic provision. Congregants who participate in community organizing learn what it means to concretely engage the work with their faith, even as they discover in doing so additional avenues to practice the skills necessary to bind and loose.

In a political world more and more dominated by the hegemony of finance and multinational corporations, these organizations offer a unique way of challenging these structures and for holding their officials and elites accountable. To this extent, not only do they offer a vehicle through which Christian congregations can reengage with the material nature of their faith and mission, but they also generate new possibilities for

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<sup>90</sup> Wood, *Faith in Action*, 72. Additionally, Heidi Swarts finds that “CBCOs unique contribution to the American organizing tradition is its combination of democratic deliberation, intensive leadership development, and a praxis that links strategic pursuit of power to shared religious values.” Swarts, *Organizing Urban America*, xvi.

political activity not determined by the vapid programs and restraints of party lines or the public/private divides of liberal political theory.<sup>91</sup> Underneath and within the larger configuration of political economy and party antics, congregation-based organizations such as NC United Power are reenergizing a network of hopeful political subjects, relying on their own unique faith commitments, convictions, skills, and processes to activate and empower them for the purpose of political renewal. Because they “don’t rely on liberal belief in the welfare state or conservative faith in the invisible hand of the market,”<sup>92</sup> organizations like NC United Power pose a unique answer to the political problems of late, global capitalism, conducting a work of political hope in the face of government gridlock and popular despair. To this end, the second half of this study describes the particular nature of the political hope offered by congregation-based organizing in a world dominated by the market.

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<sup>91</sup> Hart, *Cultural Dilemmas of Progressive Politics*, 62.

<sup>92</sup> Chambers, *Roots for Radicals*, 14.

## **Part II**

### **The Theopolitics of Time in an Age of Global Capital**

*The decay at the top must be replaced by a new, stronger life from below.*  
--Antonio Gramsci

*The ultimate meaning of history is to be found in the work of the church.*  
--John Howard Yoder

Having provided a theological interpretation of grassroots congregation-based organizing in part one, the second part of my study situates the practice of community organizing within the context of late, global capital. The apocalyptic disposition resonates with the sovereignty of God and configured in the structuring practices of the church, I have argued, provides the basis for the particular witness and service of the church at work in the activity of congregation-based community organizing. The center of this activity is the unique process of political judgment enacted in binding and loosing, a process that conforms the community to the will and life of God by resynchronizing it to the time of his reign and is extended and extrapolated in the work of organizing. As such, I suggested, CBCOs offer one apposite way for the new age present in the social, historical community of the church to interface and engage with the old age of the world, extending the reign of God and directing the world to his justice and provision. In order to better understand how the political practice of binding and loosing extended in congregational community organizing operates as a manifestation of hope, however, I want to describe the current context for this activity, analyzing the structures and powers



that currently dominate the old age of the world. To make more explicit the unique ray of hope that this form of organizing offers, therefore, I want to examine the global sovereignty of capital, especially with regard to the way it operates to capture political will and judgment. Having done so, I will also describe how CBCOs can present a faithful and, in their own way, effective challenge to imbalanced and disjointed order of capital's dominion.

The first chapter of the second part, chapter four, explains the sovereignty of capital, focusing on how as the dominant global power it configures the state and the subject. The source of its sovereignty, I will argue, rests in the way the dynamic process of production and consumption function to congeal and direct the collective, political will and how under neoliberalism the market comes to function as the mechanism of political judgment. Through the processes of capitalism, I will argue, both political will and political judgment as crucial powers of society become alienated and estranged and in the end turned back upon society in detrimental ways. Following the description of the structure of things under capital, chapter five points to the heart of its dominion in the homogenization of time and then explains how congregation-based organizing disrupts the capitalist order by enacting a process of political judgment determined by the heterogeneous time of the reign of God. By exercising the time given it in the rule of Christ, and extending and extrapolating this tempo in the process of organizing, I suggest, these organizations can enact a mode of political judgment that resists and challenges that of capital. As a manifestation of this activity, I once again return to the work of NC United Power, looking mainly at its work on foreclosure. In chapter six, I then described

how the disruption of capital through the enactment of a new time in congregation-based organizing breaks the hold of capital over history and poses new possibilities for the future. Exposing its pretensions to eternality and the promise of unlimited growth and expansion, the slow, patient but hopeful work of congregation-based organizing can challenge capital's claim on the future by turning to an alternative politics of forgiveness, provision, and trust to open the door on a new future. In the end, I will describe the way that the church through community organizing can resist the dominion of capital over time and history and offer a means of restructuring human life that resonates with the reign of God, leading the way in witness and service to more just arrangements. The possibility of doing so, I will assert, rests in the enactment of a countervailing power and mode of judgment grounded in the ecclesial practice of binding and loosing.

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## Chapter 4

### The Power, Logic, and Dominion of Global Capital

The present age is one of capital. Not only is capitalism the primary mode of economic production that structures civil society, but, as I will illustrate in this chapter, it also encompasses the political will and judgment of communities across the globe. As such, it is the unrivalled arbiter of human relations and freedom. Its dominion extends over the state, international boundaries, and into the individual subject, determining and ordering peoples' lives in accord with its peculiar mode of production, distribution, and circulation in the service of accumulation. It is in this respect that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have come to refer to it as empire, even as the reign of this empire remains subtle and may even appear liberative and beneficent.<sup>1</sup> The ascendancy of capital has, however, come to occlude the political, rendering any and all political judgments and actions outside the functions of the market completely otiose, delimiting the experience of freedom for an increasingly global culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Commenting on the political transition that has taken place with the arrival of global capitalism, Hardt and Negri argue that "...this shift makes perfectly clear and possible today the capitalist project to bring together economic power and political power, to realize, in other words, a properly capitalist order." They continue by asserting, "what used to be conflict or competition among several imperialist powers has in important respects been replaced by the idea of a single power that overdetermines them all, structures them in a unitary way, and treats them under one common notion of right that is decidedly postcolonial and postimperialist... [giving birth to] a new notion of right, or rather, a new inscription of authority and a new design of the production of norms and legal instruments of coercion that guarantee contracts and resolve conflicts." Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 9.

In this chapter, I want to highlight the salient features of the form of life emerging under the sovereignty of capital by pointing to its impact upon the democratic state and the political subject. My argument will be that within the emerging market-state a wave of de-democratization, crippling debt, lack of opportunity, fear of unemployment, growing insecurity due to the erosion of the social safety net, and growth of subjective apathy related to consumerism has, for the vast majority of citizens, come to replace the freedom of political engagement and the possibility of participating in and cultivating communities of higher goods under a global economic power asymmetrically directed to the privilege of a wealthy elite. Subsuming the political will in the process of production and consumption to the goal of accumulation and expansion, the sovereignty of capital pervades all of life, holding political judgment captive within a radical market logic of neoliberalism.<sup>2</sup> In this way, market objectives become the focus of the political will and market mechanisms the method of political judgment, displacing all other human goods and the means of discerning them.

Furthermore, I will illustrate why the standard liberal democratic attempts to counter this tide by reconstructing the protective walls of the liberal nation-state cannot

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<sup>2</sup> Wendy Brown notes that “When capital radically escapes both its container and its limits in the nation-state, when it becomes a genuinely global power, it acquires many of the specifically religious trappings of sovereignty—absolute, enduring, supreme, decisive about life and death, beyond human control, and above all beyond accountability to law or morality.” Recognizing the way in which the ascendancy of capital has both encouraged a religious devotion to its own operations and evoked a religiously tinged response, she continues by noting the main pressures provoking this rise in religiosity. Because, as she states, “external challenges and alternatives to capitalism have receded, capital itself has eroded the political limits of the nation-state, and a historically specific form of normative social and political reason, neoliberalism, fashions market rationality into a complete worldview with a totalizing reach,” the character of capital has become thoroughly religious in nature, meaning that only by confronting its religious nature do we have any hope of freeing ourselves from its dominion. See Wendy Brown, “The Sacred, the Secular, and the Profane: Charles Taylor and Karl Marx,” in *Varieties of Secularism*, ed. Michael Warner et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 103-4.

succeed in recapturing the power of capital or in rehabilitating political participation for two important reasons. First, because the welfare state can no longer fulfill the obligations it was founded to satisfy, it has become at root completely unsustainable and it is, to my mind, impossible to return to in its past configuration. The welfare state is no longer intelligible due to the fact that its means of meeting the needs of its citizens has resulted in the creation of a bloated and inefficient bureaucracy, a government which its own people have come to experience as alien. With respect to the political will, therefore, the nation state by nature estranges its citizens from a sense of their own active participation in government and, consequently, cannot counter the more positive sense of activity its citizens experience in the marketplace. The modern welfare state has become the victim of its own internal contradictions and cannot be resurrected. Second, because the influence of capital has succeeded in generating a culture saturated with consumerism and individual entrepreneurialism, it has achieved a transformation in the political subjectivity of its citizens reconfiguring them primarily as politically passive, consumer subjects, whose agency has been diverted toward the distraction of consumption or to the cultivation of themselves, and their personal human capital, for enterprise. As a result, capital has succeeded in capturing the faculty of political judgment and containing it within market mechanisms and ideologies that are solely devoted to consumption and profitable enterprise, harnessing individual agency by channeling it wholly toward procuring the necessities of life. Through a critical examination of capital, I want to highlight the degree of disparity and injustice I believe to be intrinsic to the emerging form of the capitalist state. Moreover, I want to describe how the power of capital (and I

do see capital as a power in Paul's sense of the term) operates to shape the political subjectivity of citizens in a way that atomizes, disempowers, and redirects them, making conditions more favorable for it to function unchallenged. By pointing to the way that capital has captured the will and the imagination of its constituents, I want to expose how life under this order has become relegated to insignificance, monotony, isolation, and more enslaved to necessity. By explicating the formidable conditions established within capitalism that serve to reify and reproduce its order, I stress the need for a countervailing exercise of political will and practice of political judgment capable of pursuing an alternative and liberated way of life.

### *The Sovereign Power of Capital and the Alienation of Political Will*

To say that this age is one of capital is to acknowledge that the prevailing form of life across the globe is determined by the production and consumption of commodities for the purpose of accumulation. The world market is, as Hardt and Negri claim, "a new form of sovereignty," that has established the "global order" of empire.<sup>3</sup> A human creation of unprecedented potency, capital (in its late, global form) now stands as the most dominant manifestation of collective human power and organized creativity. According to Marxist political theorist Wendy Brown, "Understood not just as a mode of production, distribution, or exchange, but as an unparalleled maker of history, capital

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, xi. As Marx noticed, the drive toward empire is genetically encoded in capitalism. In the *Grundrisse* he states, "the tendency to create the *world market* is directly given in the concept of capital itself. Every limit appears as a barrier to be overcome." Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (1973; repr., London: Penguin Books, 1993), 408.

arguably remains the dominant force in the organization of collective human existence, conditioning every element of social, political, cultural, intellectual, emotional, and kin life.”<sup>4</sup> An unmatched power, it has ascended to the apogee of a world-system that orchestrates on a grand scale the order of human life. Under the reign of capital the global market beyond anything else determines the structure of society. And yet, even as “capital is a larger, more creative, and more nearly total form of power than anything else in human history,” Brown asseverates, it “fundamentally escapes human control.”<sup>5</sup> In its sovereignty, that is to say, it takes on a life of its own, consolidating itself as an independent, global principality, exercising an alien power over society that orders human relations to the achievement of its own goals. Forming a “daimocracy” of sorts, the market made by human hands now puts us in its service, ordering our social relations and determining our political decisions. Focused solely on accumulation and profit, capital establishes an order that ensures its own growth even at the expense of human freedom, community, and flourishing. As a result, those who inhabit its order become devotees to a world structure they created but which no longer serves them as it should, becoming subjugated to a power meant to serve the goods of human life but which now makes them servants of its own distorted will. An idol sovereignty of global scale, the pursuit of accumulation, growth, and profit as the promise and end of capital increasingly structures the life of societies and cultures around the world, configuring their social relations and directing their political decisions.

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<sup>4</sup> Wendy Brown, “At the Edge,” *Political Theory* 30, no. 4 (August 2002): 563.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Such an assessment of the power of capital, however, needs more analysis and explanation. What is the general nature of capital's power and how does it assemble it? What is it about the function of capital, viewed as an overall process, that has allowed it to achieve such ascendancy? In order to grasp the enigmatic nature of capital's power as well as its drive toward global hegemony, I want to take a closer look at its dynamic essence and the process by which it consolidates power so as to take on a life of its own. I want to consider how it points human action toward accumulation and growth and how it alienates the collective will.

In volume one of *Capital*, Marx claims that the peculiar power of capital is encapsulated in the secret of the commodity, a concrete moment of the process retaining all the "metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" that make up the idolatrous and fetishistic character of capital.<sup>6</sup> It turns out that the commodity, upon Marx's critical analysis, is a microcosm of the system of capital itself. In the seemingly simple and tangible object of the commodity, the secret of capital is compressed because, while it is a concrete product, it is at the same time also "a thing which transcends sensuousness."<sup>7</sup> Hence, the entity of the commodity hides within itself the curious operation of capitalism as a whole.

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (1976; repr., London: Penguin Books, 1990), 163.

<sup>7</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 163. Commenting on the secret of capitalism, Marx continues by clarifying that, "the mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of [humanity's] own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things...[and] through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible or social" (164-5).



What marks the peculiar nature of the commodity for Marx and what allows him to see it as a microcosm of the whole of capital is that it takes on the qualities of human labor and social relations of its own production and exchange. Through the process of production a profound transfer of living energy occurs with “the end result [being] that our social relation to the laboring activity of others is disguised in the relationship between things.”<sup>8</sup> These inanimate objects appear to us as animate entities. As a result, they enjoy a kind of autonomy and begin to take on a “life of their own.”<sup>9</sup> Commodities, as objects offered for sale in the market, do not reveal the conditions or the labor necessary to produce them, but instead seem to appear out of nowhere and in doing so take the place of the real human activities and relations that have gone into their production. And, as Marx notes, “through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time suprasensible or social.”<sup>10</sup> Altering completely the sense of the shared world that arises between human beings, the real usefulness and connection to human endeavors of these products is lost, dissolved in exchange for the purpose of profit. In other words, as the Catholic theologian Vincent

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<sup>8</sup> Harvey, *Companion to Marx's Capital*, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 165.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 164-65. We can see here, with regard to the commodity, Marx sees a similar projection taking place to the one he perceived to occur in religion following the thought of Feuerbach. For, just as in religion the figments of minds take on an autonomy of their own, and as a result, proceed to engage in relations with people and one another, so a similar phenomenon takes place in regard to the fetishism of the commodity. As he avers, “I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities” (165). This idea is echoed by Wendy Brown in her view that “Profanation and fetishism are at once the peculiar power of capital and the seat of capital’s own religious bearing.” See Brown, “The Sacred,” 102. A theme that we will return to below, the religious nature of capital can be seen most prominently in the fetish that attaches itself to the specific commodity of money, a result of money being, for Marx, in its purest form “the alienated *ability* of *mankind*.” Karl Marx, and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and The Communist Manifesto*, Great Books in Philosophy, trans. Martin Milligan (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 138. Subsequently, I will refer to this volume as *EPM*.

Miller puts it, through the peculiar circuits of commodity production “we are duped into locating value in the commodity itself rather than in the human needs that drive exchange, the social systems that allow exchange to take place, or the labor necessary to produce them.”<sup>11</sup> Encountered in the marketplace, commodities appear not merely as inert objects, but as objects infused with the living energy of labor and the relations between commodities and between buyers and products replace the real social relations of the laborers who make them and the buyers who purchase them. Behind the commodity, or veiled within it, is a fetishistic system in which “the commodity hides the conditions of its production” and the value of exchange takes precedence over the usefulness of these objects for other social and political aims as the key to profit.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, and as the corresponding condition to the mystical transformation of the commodity, the laborer also undergoes a transformation, becoming a commodity-object put into the process of production by the capitalist. Because, as Marx observes, the capitalist’s aim is to produce commodities, the sale of which or the exchange of which can procure her a profit, to do so she must locate “a special commodity on the market” capable of generating surplus-value, which is the quality congealed in the commodity that enchants it with exchange value.<sup>13</sup> The special commodity that presents the capitalist with the key ingredient for creating surplus-value is, of course, labor-power [*Arbeitskraft*], which has been freed for capital exploitation by

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<sup>11</sup> Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 36.

<sup>12</sup> Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 293, 270.

the history of “primitive accumulation”<sup>14</sup> and made available in the labor market as wage labor. Thus, while the commodity through fetishization is raised to the level of a social being, the human being (laborer) is reduced to a mere object, to the commodity of labor power free from land and social connections and sold as a raw material on the market.<sup>15</sup> Inverting them qualitatively, the enchantment of the commodity in the process of production relies on the objectivization of human beings as wage labor to be sold on the market. The result, as Marx starkly puts it, is that

The means of production are at once changed into means for the absorption of the labour of others. It is no longer the worker who employs the means of production, but the means of production which employ the worker. Instead of being consumed by him as material elements of his productive activity, they consume him as the ferment necessary to their own life-process, and the life-process of capital consists solely in its own motion as self-valorizing value.<sup>16</sup>

It is not necessary to hold to every aspect of the labor theory of value Marx inherits from Ricardo and Smith to recognize that in the way he works it out Marx has his finger on a very important transfer of energy and agency intrinsic to the operation of capital. For Marx, the key to the expansive power of capital and the fuel that continues to feed its engine of growth is the appropriation of human spirit in labor. This is the secret of capital’s power, a secret Marx intuits fairly early. Already in his 1844 Manuscripts Marx

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<sup>14</sup> Wage labor, or as Marx terms it “free labor” (in the sense that it appears on the market free from any impediments for its employment), is the result of an “actual history” in which “conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, play the greatest part,” the result of a history of revolutions and older modes of production that eventually gave rise to a distinction between those holding money and those who hold only their own labor and have “nothing to sell except their own skins.” Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 273-74.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 163. Reflecting on the transformation of the human in the process of commodity production, Alasdair MacIntyre observes that “when a man as worker becomes himself a commodity, he is fundamentally alienated, estranged from himself.” Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 2001), 47.

<sup>16</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 425.

argues that the heart of capitalist production is a process that estranges labor and, having passed through the alienating circuits of capital, creates the peculiar situation in which the laborer's own energy confronts her as an external power. Thus, while the true human and social origins of this power remain hidden from those within capital, it manifests itself as an independent and alien entity, one claiming dominion over their lives.<sup>17</sup> What was essentially a human creation is exalted through the mystical arrangements of this process to a place of power, dominating and determining these same human lives as something beyond their control. Under a capitalist mode of production, as Marx notes, "the worker himself constantly produces objective wealth, in the form of capital, an alien power that dominates and exploits him."<sup>18</sup> Thus, while the nature of capital is "vampire-like,"<sup>19</sup> in that it lives off of the vital energy of its workers, it also functions to consolidate human activity in a way that transmutes this consolidated agency into an external and alien sovereignty. As a result, it takes on an agency, or will, of its own, exercising a seemingly autonomous power that must be recognized and obeyed. The secret of capital's power is based in the alienation and distortion of collective human power and agency externalized and turned against itself.

Of course while capital does deploy more explicit class force to maintain its sovereignty, its dominance more importantly arises from its ability to entice and to

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<sup>17</sup> See Marx's essay on "Estranged Labor" in the *EPM*, 71-73. While I have no intention of engaging the thesis posed by Louis Althusser regarding the differences between early and late Marx, it seems obvious to me that this essential insight remains constant throughout the entirety of Marx's oeuvre. Indeed, Marx continues this line of thinking in "The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret," in *Capital Volume I*, 163ff. Even as we must, no doubt, embark upon updating Marx's notion of the labor theory of value, we can still acknowledge the basic tenet encapsulated in his critique at this point.

<sup>18</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 716.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

integrate the will and desire of its constituents. As what makes capital appear so appealing, it promises to increase general wealth, and with this, to expand freedom, leisure, and overall standards of living. The result is that not only does the process of production under capital congeal the energy and agency of society by means of labor, but it also consolidates the collective will of its inhabitants through capturing their desires in consumption. As Marx states, a commodity is “an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind,”<sup>20</sup> and it is by enticing human desire (of any and every kind) that commodities appeal to us in the market. By piquing and captivating desire, that is, by enticing a consumer with a product that appears to fulfill her interest or need, the market operates through its organized “means of consumption” to coagulate individual desires in an integrated and mutually fulfilling structure.<sup>21</sup> Because it is an institution of coordinated self-interest and consumer desire, the market forms a collective will consolidating consumer interests with productive interests in the pursuit of wealth and growth. By congealing desire and will in this way, as Thomas Frank has observed, the market expresses a “popular will” that operates beyond the function of mediating exchange and, instead, serves as a “medium of consent” to engender a “market populism.”<sup>22</sup> Because self-interest, so the logic goes, leads naturally to specialization and

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>21</sup> George Ritzer reminds us that while Marx pays little attention to the consumptive side of capital, when he does he often speaks directly in terms of the commodity itself, confusing the thing consumed with the organized institutions that offer the means of consumption. Ritzer’s study of the means of consumption, or “those things that make it possible for people to acquire goods and services and for the same people to be controlled and exploited by as consumers,” can be found in Ritzer, *Explorations in the Sociology of Consumption: Fast Food, Credit Cards, and Casinos* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 110ff.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God: Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism, and the End of Economic Democracy* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), xiv.

specialization to greater production, more goods are made available for unfettered consumption. The market gives us what we want and incorporates our interests, lifting all boats, so we believe, with its rising tide of wealth. Thus not only do those on the supply side of the market enjoy the freedom of acting in accord with their own interest, but also on the demand side consumers are free to consume the goods they desire by selecting them from the variety of commodities made available in the market. Consequently, a powerful, but seemingly natural, social organism emerges appearing to order society more effectively, sufficiently, and beneficently.

Coagulating the collective will through production and consumption, capital captures that will and solidifies its own legitimacy and authority.<sup>23</sup> But it does so by offering only an ersatz freedom that comes at the hidden cost of distorting society and by privileging lesser, insignificant goods as the highest individual and political aim. As Foucault puts it, “[the market] produces political sovereignty through the institution and institutional game that, precisely, makes this economy work.” And beyond simply creating public law or legal legitimacy, “it produces something even more real, concrete, and immediate.” That is to say, “it produces a permanent consensus of all those who may appear as agents within these economic processes, as investors, workers, employers, and trade unions. All these economic partners produce a consensus, which is a political

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<sup>23</sup> Once again, I use the term “authority” here with Arendt’s definition in mind wherein authority is a willing cooperation that does not imply violence. That is not to say that capitalism, especially in its neoliberal, global form does not employ violence, but it is to recognize that that violence is usually enacted against those outside of the system or who are being prepared to enter the system because those within the system are more than willing to comply with market forces. See Hannah Arendt, “What is Authority?” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 102f. At the same time, however, the market is really an ersatz authority, posing as if it were the tradition handed down throughout human history and recognized today as the rightful heir to sovereign power.

consensus, inasmuch as they accept the economic game of freedom.”<sup>24</sup> The institution of “the free market,” therefore Foucault concludes, “binds and manifests political bonds.”<sup>25</sup> What with respect to immediate self-interest and consumption appears as freedom is actually the submission of the producer’s and consumer’s will to the authority of the sovereign market, which now determines and dispenses that freedom. A society of what sociologist George Ritzer has called “prosumers”—for whom the melding of consumption and production together often within the same activity—has emerged, encapsulating the unified will for the market that solidifies and bolsters the power and sovereignty of capital. Capital via the market thus comes to exercise its own way of meeting needs, making decisions, resolving conflicts, reproducing conditions favorable for itself, discerning among options, identifying and distributing goods, and organizing social relations. In short, capital orders collective life, establishes its ends, and defines freedom and meaningfulness accordingly.

While it may appear at first blush that it is primarily laborers and lower-end consumers who subject themselves to the political will of the market and accept its determination of freedom, the capitalist is no exception to this process. For the capitalist, the market also dictates the actions she must take in order to augment her exchange-values and procure profits.<sup>26</sup> The freedom of capital, even for the capitalist, is no freedom at all. In fact, it is a new, if complex, form of captivity. Because the inherent drive of

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<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2010), 84.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 85. Foucault’s discussion focuses on German neoliberalism in this context, but the underlying point concerning the way in which the market serves to generate a collective will, I think, can be applied to any fully developed capitalist state.

<sup>26</sup> Harvey, *Companion to Marx’s Capital*, 257.

capital is to accumulation, to grow and expand, the capitalist is bound by this economic law to recapitalize her profits, investing them again in the circuits of capital in order to achieve more profit. “Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!” as Marx somewhat acerbically puts it.<sup>27</sup> By necessity, then, the capitalist, while acting in concert with her own self-interest, must pursue growth and expansion—the same drive that governs production and consumption. She must generate more capital. The vitality of a capitalist social order depends upon the necessity that it grow and accumulate, and it must continue to do so exponentially. In fact, for a capitalist economy to qualify as healthy it must be growing at a three to four percent compound rate.<sup>28</sup> The capitalist, just like the laborer and the consumer, is captive to this drive. Anything that might hamper growth, whether in the form of wastefulness or savings, is a threat to the good not only of the general population, but also to owners and investors, as all must be laid on the altar of this goal. Marking the success or failure of the pursuit of growth, indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the Dow Jones Industrial Average, the Standard and Poor’s 500 Index, or the NASDAQ chart the health and vitality of the people, who hope and pray for their continued increase. Under the mantra of growth, these indicators translate to us the good of “accumulation for the sake of accumulation and production for the sake of production,”<sup>29</sup> as omens of national devotion. Established above all rivals, to reiterate, the good of accumulation and production in the achievement of growth becomes the

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<sup>27</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 742.

<sup>28</sup> Harvey, *Companion to Marx’s Capital*, 259. Another commenter on the idolatry of growth has been Bill McKibben. See his *Deep Economy: the Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (New York: Times Books, 2007).

<sup>29</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 742.



purpose of a capitalist order, the overarching focus of collective life and the sole imperative of the political will. For capitalist and worker alike, and for the whole of society under capital for that matter, what appears as freedom turns out to be captivity because they end up subjecting the entirety of their lives to the economic good of growth and the expansion of wealth.

Moreover, as Marx recognized in his critique of political economy, the goal of accumulation, growth, and expansion leads within capital to the financialization of life, as power increasingly becomes associated with money and concentrated in the finance industry even while it expands globally. Consolidating the collective will and turning it toward the objective of economic growth, sovereign power within a capitalist order clings to and becomes represented in money, allowing it to become concentrated while at the same time appearing dispersed. Because money is not only the mediating commodity of exchange (and is therefore widely distributed) but also the preferred form of profit (and therefore concentrated), it quickly becomes in itself the aim and governor of production and circulation as well as the key to consumption. Because at heart capital is a process of valorization, money tends in its role as mediator and end to represent power itself.<sup>30</sup> Money becomes the good, the embodiment of the divine which remains accessible to all

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<sup>30</sup> Remarking on the process of “valorization” in *Capital Volume I*, Marx states, “By turning his money into commodities which serve as the building materials for a new product, and as factors in the labour process, by incorporating living labour into their lifeless objectivity, the capitalist simultaneously transforms value, i.e. past labour in its objectified and lifeless form, into capital, value which can perform its own valorization process, an animated monster which begins to,” quoting Faust, “‘work,’ ‘as if its body were by love possessed.’” Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 302. Valorization, as we will see shortly, is therefore dependent upon the fetishistic operation of the commodity, allowing the surface level process of valorization to operate in a parasitic manner upon the hidden activities of labor in the process of production.

but pursues its own will. Money, thus, comes to play a central role in capital, as the instrument and emblem of growth and expansion and the good for all.

Yet, in this process money begins to function for its own good, or better, for the good of the capitalist who in his attempt to amass it aims to reproduce it. More specifically, that is to say, “Capital...is money used in a certain way.”<sup>31</sup> Where it had initially served as a mediator between commodities in their exchange (C-M-C), within the dynamic process of capital money rises within this mode of exchange to become the drive and form of capital itself as it becomes the alpha and omega of circulation (M-C-M' or even M-M').<sup>32</sup> In other words, the process of capital quickly becomes the process of putting money into circulation in order to get more money thereby concentrating it in the hands of those on the privileged side of this process.<sup>33</sup> The effect of this process is that money becomes the emblem and the embodied form of capital's sovereignty; its beginning, its end, and the mark of its power. As “the god among commodities” within a capitalist system, money is endowed with a mysterious power, a necromancy, because not only is it the universal form of value and therefore wealth, but it also seems to be able

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<sup>31</sup> David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (London: Verso, 2010), 87-88.

<sup>32</sup> Marx states that “...capital is money, capital is commodities. In truth, however, value is here a subject of a process in which, while constantly assuming the form in turn of money and commodities, it changes its own magnitude, throws off surplus-value from itself considered as original value, and thus valorizes itself independently... By virtue of being value, it has acquired the occult ability to add value to itself... Money therefore forms the starting-point and the conclusion of every valorization process.” Hence, “the capitalist knows that all commodities, however tattered they may look or however badly they may smell, are in faith and in truth money, ...[and] a wonderful means for making still more money out of money.” Consequently, “M-C-M' is in fact therefore the general formula for capital, in the form in which it appears directly in the sphere of circulation.” Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 255-56.

<sup>33</sup> Harvey, *Companion to Marx's Capital*, 76.

to create and reproduce itself.<sup>34</sup> Money comes to represent the whole of the global market system, the mysterious form that hovers over the underlying processes of production, circulation, and consumption, the widely recognized mark of power that carries within itself the concentrated energy of labor, desire, and collective will. “The magic of money,” or “the riddle of the money fetish,” as Marx puts it, “is therefore the riddle of the commodity fetish, now become visible and dazzling to our eyes.”<sup>35</sup> Hence, given that money is not only a medium of exchange but also the objective representation of value itself, “the rise of the money-form is what permits value to start to crystallize out as the guiding principle of how a capitalist economy will work,” because it is in money that the collective will, the power and agency, extracted in the process of production and congealed in the sale of commodities is represented.<sup>36</sup> In a nutshell, then, as Randy Martin puts it, “In a market economy, money is both the means and ends of life.”<sup>37</sup> The manifest goal of capital and the success of its operation, money embodies in concentrated and objective form, the general will of the capitalist order as the essential element of growth, power, legitimacy, and public good.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 221, 233. Terry Eagleton recognizes that “Money for Marx is idealist through and through, a real of chimerical fantasy in which all identity is ephemeral and any object may be transmuted at a stroke to any other.” Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 201.

<sup>35</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 187.

<sup>36</sup> Harvey, *Companion to Marx's Capital*, 36-7. Commenting on the peculiar relation that develops between the dialectical nature of money and the circulation of commodities, Marx comments, “From the fact that the commodity develops into general exchange value, it follows that exchange value becomes a specific commodity: it can do so only because a specific commodity obtains the privilege of representing, symbolizing, the exchange value of all other commodities, i.e. of becoming *money*.” See Marx, *Grundrisse*, 167.

<sup>37</sup> Randy Martin, *Financialization of Daily Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>38</sup> As will become more evident later, by connecting money to the political will I am attempting to show how in a highly developed capitalist system money begins to take on the fundamental qualities of the

Organized under the divine emblem of money, a capitalist order tends to promote the concentration of money-power as well as the expansion of its sovereignty across the globe.<sup>39</sup> Both are the result of the growing influence of finance in everyday life. Because “growing wealthy becomes an end in itself” the system as a whole tends to privilege speedier returns while at the same time seeking to eliminate any barriers to expansion. As a result, finance becomes more prominent and more pervasive due to the fact that it functions as the source of consumer and investor power through credit and as the generator and claimant of power through returns on investments, interest, and expansion into new markets. The congealed political will, therefore, becomes associated with and even embodied in the drive toward finance, amplifying the role of credit, and access to it, as a means of power and political participation and privileging speculative innovation<sup>40</sup> as the key mechanism of growth and global expansion. The result is the increasing

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state. Describing the state, Paul Kahn asserts, “We must not think of the state as something that simply happens in the world like a fact of nature. Neither, however, is it a mere order of norms derived from other norms. The state is not a thing or a rule; it is a power that is continually making history one way rather than another. It requires energy—*dunamis* in the classical sense. It must continually will itself into being.” Paul W. Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 52. In my Marxist examination of money above, I have tried to show the way in which the process of capital consolidates power and exercises this power in the peculiar way such that money seems to will itself into existence.

<sup>39</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 772-81.

<sup>40</sup> Marx refers to such speculative innovations as “fictitious capital,” because the real basis of the growth it creates tends to be in overvaluing assets within a sophisticated system of gambling on futures. As a result, the economic growth connected to these assets becomes disconnected from any objective reality. See Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume III*, trans. David Fernbach (1981; repr., London: Penguin Books, 1991), 597. Of course the problem with the move toward financialization that results in fictitious capital is that it falsely assumes that capital can be generated merely by circulation. The capital derived from circulation is merely fictitious, lacking any real substance. But this does not stop finance capital from acting politically as if it were real. As Bob Jessop has noted, while markets, especially financial markets, mediate the search for added value they cannot produce it, a fact that generates contradictions. Bob Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2002), 276.

concentration of power in the finance industry.<sup>41</sup> The natural proclivity is, therefore, for those who control access to and the flow of money as well as those who know how to reproduce it within the capitalist system to move and make the popular will. And with this power, these elites are able to make recourse to a “unique fusion of state and capital” in order to procure returns and to insure domestic and international investments.<sup>42</sup> Fixated on growth and profit, there is a tendency for a certain regime of accumulation to emerge that fuses business and state agencies and privileges speculative investment, innovative financial products, highly active currency markets, and especially credit, which comes to function as the “central nervous system for directing and controlling the global dynamics of capital accumulation.”<sup>43</sup> While globally the power of capital becomes increasingly dominant and widespread, it also becomes increasingly concentrated in the hands of creditors and financiers who stand at the center and operate on both sides of the supply/demand and production/consumption relations.<sup>44</sup> Focused on the good of economic growth and expansion, the global order of capital is consolidated in the extremely flexible form of money and becomes concentrated in the activity of finance.

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<sup>41</sup> On the intrinsic drive of capital toward financialization and its connection to the development of a world system, see Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of our Time*, New and Updated Edition (1994, repr., New York: Verso, 2010), 6.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 12-3. The development of capitalism as a world system, as Arrighi and Silver note elsewhere, should not be understood to be a straight and smooth line of the evolution of capital hegemony. Instead, the evolution of capitalist hegemony should be seen as a “series of breaks in established patterns of governance, accumulation, and social cohesion” along a circuitous route through the decay of one hegemonic power to the rise of another. See Giovanni Arrighi and Beverly J. Silver, “Conclusion,” in *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*, Contradictions in Modernity Volume 10 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 271.

<sup>43</sup> Harvey, *Companion to Marx’s Capital*, 334.

<sup>44</sup> One apposite example of the way finance capital operates on both sides of the supply/demand and production/realization relations can be seen in the housing market itself, wherein large banks both financed the explosion of home building throughout the 1990s and the last decade and financed the purchase of these same homes by offering private mortgages.

Within a political register it becomes clear that while no one exactly controls the forces of the market, its power has come to dominate human relations across the globe, and especially for those in Western societies where the political will has been absorbed into its operations and aims.<sup>45</sup> Imbued with a sense of divine omnipotence, money comes to symbolize freedom within the dominion of capital, appearing to offer ultimate liberation from necessity and human finitude. Money becomes the supreme good as the whole purpose of commodity production and the end of circulation, overturning and transforming all of society. Hence, the ineffable goods of real social relations find themselves profaned and captured by the prevailing power of money, as everything bows to the operations of finance.<sup>46</sup> A power larger and more expansive than anything yet produced in human history, global capital enjoys nearly unchecked freedom to direct and shape human relations and life. As money takes on a divine quality, it plays more and more of a role in structuring human interactions and determining human aims.<sup>47</sup> Within the form of life of capital, money through the market displays the power both to create

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<sup>45</sup> Harvey, *Companion to Marx's Capital*, 42.

<sup>46</sup> Wendy Brown, commenting on this passage from Marx's 1844 Manuscripts, remarks that "Money profanes and desacralizes insofar as it destroys ineffable goods and qualities such as love, intelligence, beauty, bravery, and honesty by making them purchasable." Brown, "The Sacred, the Secular, and the Profane," 99. And David Harvey asserts that "Marx anticipates the monetization of everything, as well as the spread of credit and finance in ways that would radically transform both economic and social relations." Harvey, *Companion to Marx's Capital*, 80-81. He continues, picking this thread up later on, to point out that Marx displays how the real communal relations of human beings were transformed by the fact that money itself began to determine the relations of the community such that interpersonal social relations were replaced by a community of money embodied in the activity of exchange (294).

<sup>47</sup> Speaking to the potency of capital as a world-system, Wendy Brown states, "As it makes man and the world in the image of itself, capital exercises a religious power, one that supplants man's own sovereignty and displaces man's own essential nature as a species being and as a creative being." Brown, "The Sacred, the Secular, and the Profane," 94.

and to sustain existence, as the objective representation of human devotion and energy coagulated and mobilized in the pursuit of multiplying and reproducing itself.<sup>48</sup>

The sovereignty of capital embodied in the popular will of the market, and particularly financial markets, however, is not an inevitable law of social, economic, or political evolution. Its dominion has an origin and a history, one intimately connected to the development of a specific logic that has prized relinquishing political judgment to the market. It is a logic that arose in Western states, most specifically the U.S. and Britain, serving as the political rationale that facilitated the development and advance of late, global capital. Throughout the development of capitalism, not only has the state played an important role in printing, regulating, insuring, and making available the commodity of money for capital investment, but the ascendancy of late, global capital has arisen in relation to the favorable conditions created by the specific logic of neoliberalism. Given that the sovereignty of capital requires a state and especially a global military for its existence, its advent is connected to the institutional support and economic policies of this particular political ideology which emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century. While never stable or static, the relationship between the state and capital has been

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<sup>48</sup> Philip Goodchild even goes so far as to suggest that within capitalism money takes on a metaphysical status as a result of the full maturation of the logic of capital in the M-M' equation of interest-bearing capital in speculation. Thus, he remarks, "Money 'in its most fetishized form' becomes the true nature of money, for the current value of any asset, whether fixed or variable capital, depends mainly on expectations about its future performance and expected yield, including its yield from speculative inflation. Thus far from money being a substance, or even a fixed, nominal quantity, it is a differential rate, a deterritorialized and decoded flow, with no intrinsic meaning. It is an unlimited 'good', accountable to no one and determined by no one." And with respect to its role as a standard for deferred payments, it stands completely unique because "with no other commodity can a claim to the commodity serve the same purpose as the thing itself. [Thus] money is no longer identifiable as a commodity." Philip Goodchild, "Capital and Kingdom: An Eschatological Ontology," in *Theology and the Political*, ed. Creston Davis et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 132-33.

critical to the formation of capital's global sovereignty. It is to the nature and consequences of this political logic that I want to turn now.

### *The Ascendency of Capital and the Neoliberal Consensus*

As I have argued, the sovereignty consolidated in capital's market populism channels desire and creativity toward economic growth and expansion. Politically this means that the congealing of capital's power occurs along the two parallel lines of consumption and production to form a collective, if alienated, will assembled under and clinging to the representative form of money. Furthermore, because it becomes fixated on money, this capitalist order trends toward financialization as its most complete expression. Capital's rise to global hegemony has only become possible however, as I will argue below, because of the prominence of a corresponding mode of political judgment that privileges the free market as the primary mechanism for orchestrating human well-being. Hence, the unchallenged sovereignty of capital is bolstered by a complementary logic of political judgment that surrenders discernment to the mechanisms of the free market. The coordination between the state and capital within the historically contingent conception of neoliberal political economics has created the conditions for capital's ascendency. For, as I will show, it is only under the neoliberal consensus of the past forty years that the global hegemony of capital has really emerged, due to the fact that these policies have promoted the disembedding of capital by



reassigning political judgment to the market.<sup>49</sup> As a dominant ideology, neoliberalism sets the terms of deliberation and discussion as well as the general framework for collective decisions, the possible options to be considered, and how to go about discerning what is best. The result of the proliferation of neoliberal ideology and its promotion of autonomous markets, however, is not a more just and reconciled world but instead one plagued by vast disparities, diminished political freedom, ecological destruction, individual atomization, and increased instability for more and more citizens whose lives are devoted overwhelmingly to basic necessities.

A complete discussion of the complex historical development of the state and capital consensus in neoliberalism is beyond the aim of this study. However, to better clarify the hegemony of capital I want to describe neoliberalism and to take a brief look at its genesis and how this consensus privileges the market as the arbiter of political judgment. More thorough discussions of neoliberalism can be found elsewhere, but let me begin with a brief definition of neoliberalism by sketching its roots and describing how it cedes political judgment to the market before turning my attention to the type of world it has fashioned.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> On the “disembedding” of liberalism under the neoliberal consensus, see Mark Blyth, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Blyth’s starting point is based in the work of Karl Polanyi in *The Great Transformation*.

<sup>50</sup> For more thorough discussions of neoliberalism see, Philip Armstrong, Andrew Glyn, and John Harrison, *Capitalism Since World War II: The Making and Breakup of the Great Boom* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1984); Blyth, *Great Transformations*; Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, *Capital Resurgent: Roots of the Neoliberal Revolution*, trans. Derek Jeffers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God*; and David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

According to David Harvey, as an ideology of both the individual and the state, neoliberalism

is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.<sup>51</sup>

In essence neoliberalism, therefore, is an alliance between business and state agencies that embraces an exaggerated form of economic liberalism by assuming market mechanisms and market rationality offer the optimal means of organizing all socio-political relations and decisions. Additionally, its rationale assumes that the skills of business management are more adept at ordering and facilitating political and social life than are juridical or governing principles.<sup>52</sup> As Wendy Brown puts it, “While the political rationality of neoliberalism is based on a certain conception of the market, its organization of governance and the social is not merely the result of leakage from the economic to other spheres but rather of the explicit imposition of a particular form of market rationality on these spheres.”<sup>53</sup> To this extent, with its focus on market mechanisms and logic, neoliberalism excludes all other political forms of rationality and thereby restricts the exercise of freedom to the free-hand of market selection and the free

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<sup>51</sup> Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Wendy Brown, “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization,” *Political Theory* 34, no.6 (December, 2006): 694-95. The 2012 race for NC Lieutenant Governor provided a vivid illustration of this ideology in the campaign slogan of Republican candidate Dan Forest, who was eventually elected to the position. Printed on one of his promotional materials mailed out to the general public of NC was the slogan: “Don’t send another politician to Raleigh to do a businessman’s job. Send Dan Forest.”

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 693-94.

enterprise of bringing goods to the market. Within the “market populism” of the neoliberal consensus, that is to say, “the political” is viewed as “the realm of hopeless and unavoidable corruption,” while “the corporate world is where the people’s work is done, where real power resides.”<sup>54</sup> When it comes to political judgment, then, neoliberal rationale defers to the market, seeing in market mechanisms the most effective means of organizing political and social life because, in contrast to the government, the impersonal forces of the market are thought to foster efficiency and freedom.<sup>55</sup> As a result, neoliberalism casts all political decisions and social relations in light of market operations, believing that such mechanisms better discern and arbitrate these engagements. Within a neoliberal rationale, in other words, political judgment has become captive to functions of the market.

While neoliberalism adamantly resists government involvement, deferring to markets as the best mechanism for organizing and orchestrating collective decisions and relations, the formation of the consensus of this ideology is the result of a specific alliance between state and corporate leaders and their institutions. Throughout the history of capital each regime of accumulation has possessed its own unique state and business alliance, and neoliberalism is no different. But the neoliberal consensus that currently resides at the heart of the global system of capital, resulting from a more intense fusion of business and state agencies, has established a nexus of unrivaled power. The roots of the neoliberal “alliance” between the state and capital reside in the natural trend I outlined

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<sup>54</sup> Frank, *One Market Under God*, 50.

<sup>55</sup> Armstrong, *Capitalism Since World War II*, 403.

above for the cycle of capital accumulation to move from commodity production toward finance and investment.<sup>56</sup> But in order for finance to reach such international transcendence as characterizes late, global capital it was necessary for a corresponding political ideology to develop and to saturate the culture, solidify the market's position as the predominant mechanism of political judgment. The neoliberal commitments to small government, pro-business environments, anti-labor policies, bank and corporate deregulation, privatization, and monetary policy as a remedy for inflation were the ideological answer, all aimed to cede ethics and human action to the free market.<sup>57</sup>

The formation of an organic relationship between capital and the political institutions of Western democratic states under the ideology of neoliberalism emerged as a response to the production crises of the 1970s, as postwar economies of nations that roared through the 50s and 60s began to falter and unemployment and inflation spiked. In the U.S. and Britain production sagged and investments weakened. Meanwhile, the OPEC oil embargo of 1973 caused the price of energy to surge while the recirculation of petro-dollars through the stock markets of New York and London flooded the economies

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<sup>56</sup> Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, 333. While I lack the space to adequately recount Arrighi's argument, I rely heavily upon his study of the recurrent trends of capital accumulation from Venice of the thirteenth century and Genoa in the fourteenth to the current crisis of U.S. led capitalism. Building on the work of Braudel, Arrighi describes the way capital as a world system gravitates in its growth toward a point of crisis due to overaccumulation. In response to this crisis of overaccumulation, the trend of capitalist systems is to enter into a period of financialization, a response however that also precipitates the waning of the dominant regime of accumulation. As Arrighi argues, "Thus understood, Marx's formula tells us that capitalist agencies do not invest money in particular input-output combinations, with all the attendant loss of flexibility and freedom of choice, as an end in itself. Rather, they do so as a *means* toward the end of securing even greater flexibility and freedom of choice at some future point. Marx's formula also tells us that if there is no expectation on the part of capitalist agencies that their freedom of choice will increase, or if this expectation is systematically unfulfilled, capital *tends* to revert to more flexible forms of investment—above all, to its money form. In other words, capital agencies 'prefer' liquidity, and an unusually large share of their cash flows tends to remain in liquid form" (5).

<sup>57</sup> Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 3.

with cash. Due to the fact that Keynesian, or fiscal, policies no longer seemed to be working, these nations began to turn to the instruments of deregulation, open markets, free trade, monetarism, privatization, and strong support for finance in order to reboot their stagnate and deteriorating economies. As David Harvey puts it, “The turn to financialization since 1973 was one born of necessity. It offered a way of dealing with the surplus absorption problem,” a problem he describes as one that emerges when there is a flush of liquid capital available but when production no longer entices investment by offering reasonable profits.<sup>58</sup> In the interest of maintaining growth, therefore, proponents of free markets began to work to establish a political consensus that sought the answer to this crisis by privileging finance through deregulation and tax deductions, monetary policy to control inflation, and government reduction through privatization. Another central tenet of the neoliberal consensus was the need to curtail the power of organized labor, as a way of reducing wages and pensions in order to lower production expenses and thereby entice investments with the possibility of renewed profits. Based in the monetarist policies of Federal Reserve Bank chairman Paul Volker and in the administrative efforts of both Reagan and Thatcher on deregulation, union-busting, tax cuts, and the retraction of government programs (of course the military excluded, which grew enormously), the neoliberal consensus gained its true foothold. And from the epicenter of these imperial powers, it would soon envelop the entire globe, as an international system of late capital<sup>59</sup> started to emerge in the decades that followed.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*, 30.

<sup>59</sup> The term “late capital” can be attributed to Ernest Mandel’s study of the epochal developments of capitalism in *Late Capitalism*, trans. Joeis de Bres (London, UK: New Left Books, 1975). Mandel’s

Over the past 30 years the hegemony of neoliberal ideology, through the efforts of Western superpowers to promote and impose it, has become pervasive, driving not only domestic politics and militarism but also international institutions such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.<sup>61</sup> The result is that the advance of neoliberalism has served to solidify the power of capital, to legitimize its sovereign authority, and to harmonize political judgment around the globe to the interest of the will of finance and capital investment.

Left to the market to determine and to orchestrate political outcomes, however, a remarkably distorted form of life has emerged under the logic of neoliberalism. Facilitated by a neoliberal mode of political judgment, a world marked by vast disparities characterizes the dominion of capital's regime of accumulation. Under this mode of political judgment vast concentrations of wealth, power, and opportunity have amassed in the hands of a small elite, while its complete devotion to market logic has engendered insecurity, lower standards of living, debt dependency, and disenfranchisement for the large majority of those on the bottom.<sup>62</sup> While not exercising complete control of the

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Marxist analysis argues that the current stage of capitalist development is both the third and most pure stage of post-industrial (or as Fredric Jameson more properly terms it: "multinational" capital) and that this last stage of capital augurs that the end of capitalism is near. By using the term, I intend to maintain Mandel's sense of the maturity of capital in its multinational (and as I will argue, financialized) form while distancing myself from the notion that it is waning or that the inevitability of revolution out of capital is immanent. See Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 35.

<sup>60</sup> Duménil and Lévy, *Capital Resurgent*, 210-11.

<sup>61</sup> Much of the story of these institutions and their integration into the neoliberal consensus can be found in Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003).

<sup>62</sup> A 2009 report by the McKinsey Global Institute on consumer debt found that "When low rates were combined with looser lending standards, consumer borrowing soared. From 2000 through 2007, the ratio of household debt to disposable income shot up from 101 percent to 138 percent—as much in seven

market or operating above its sovereignty, capitalist elites have utilized the pro-market consensus fostered by neoliberalism to secure their own benefit. To this extent, while it proclaims to be a political rationality dedicated to “individual freedom, liberty, personal responsibility and the virtues of privatization, the free market and free trade,” the alliance of state and business agencies in neoliberalism actually operate as a dominant mode of economic development and state power to “[legitimize] draconian policies designed to restore and consolidate capitalist class power” in a logic that privatizes profits while socializing risk.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the effects of the deployment of this logic have simply been to intensify the natural proclivity of capital to generate growth and expansion by extorting and depleting the citizenry of its vital energies and its active engagements as well as limiting and curtailing their access to social and material necessities.

As a mode of class power, the windfalls won for the capitalist class under neoliberal ideology exhibits two important features for the trajectory of societies across the globe with one accompanying result for workers. The first feature is connected to

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years as in the previous quarter century. Even with low interest rates, the ration of household debt service payments to income rose to a record high. Most of this borrowing fueled consumption. For instance, from 2003 through the third quarter of 2008, US households extracted \$2.3 trillion of equity from their homes in the form of home equity loans and cash-out refinancings. Nearly 40 percent of this--\$897 billion, an amount bigger than the recently approved US government stimulus package—went directly to finance home improvement or personal consumption. And much of the remaining 60 percent of extracted cash was used to pay down credit card debt, auto loans, and other liabilities, thus financing consumption indirectly. The money not spent on consumption was invested, helping fuel gains in stock markets and other financial assets.” Martin N. Bailey, Susan Lund, and Charles Atkins, “Will US consumer debt reduction cripple the recovery?” a study of the McKinsey Global Institute (McKinsey, March 2009), 2-3. Also displaying the rise of finance throughout the U.S. economy and even over the quintessential lines of U.S. production, in 2008 U.S. car dealers began to make more in profits through the financing and insuring of the cars they sold than in proceeds from sales of cars themselves. See “2009 F & I Statistics” in *F&I Magazine* (December 2009), 26: available online at [http://www.fi-magazine.com/dm\\_resources/stats/FI-24-31-7.pdf](http://www.fi-magazine.com/dm_resources/stats/FI-24-31-7.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*, 10.

growing influence and importance of finance, and is evidenced in a complex means of redistributing income from the bottom to the top by creating instability. Neoliberalism encourages a regime of accumulation driven by finance that procures returns and maintains growth by dispossessing others and generating volatility. Since the deregulatory policies of the neoliberalism of Reagan and Thatcher, the true power and ascendancy of finance across the globe, as David Harvey observes, has taken the form of a new wave of predatory and speculative style investment that promotes “accumulation by dispossession.”<sup>64</sup> Erupting crises in Mexico (1982 and 1994), Chile (1982), Russia (due to post 1989 shock-therapy), Asia (1997), Argentina (1999-2002), and the most recent European troubles in Greece, Spain, Italy, and Portugal that have periodically plagued the last 30 years all testify to the way in which a neoliberal rationale has left more societies exposed to the vagaries of finance.

But what may be less apparent is the way the growth of finance and the instability associated with it have served to reallocate wealth. For instance, while the turnover of daily financial transactions exploded between 1983 and 2001, rising from \$2.5 billion to \$130 billion—an annual turnover over forty times larger than was necessary to support international trade and productive investment—the motor of this increase in activity was simply “churning,” a practice whereby traders repeatedly buy and sell for no other reason than to make money off of transaction fees.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, by manipulating currency rates, traders were able to turn the massive \$4.7 trillion a day currency exchange market

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<sup>64</sup> David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 137-82.

<sup>65</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 161.



(another testament to the proclivity in capital for money to reproduce itself) to their own benefit at the expense of local and state governments.<sup>66</sup> In the U. S. between 1980 and the mid-1990s the issuance of new bonds nearly quintupled, growing from nearly three percent of GDP to almost fifteen percent, even as only three percent of American households were bond-holders.<sup>67</sup> Much of this explosive growth, which would continue over the next decade, was spurred by the creation of the new shadow banking industry, a fact that would only be exposed by the housing crisis of 2007-008. By dealing in innovative and unstable products such as derivatives and by tripling their leverage, a practice made possible by the deregulatory policies of the Securities and Exchange Commission, financial institutions were able to exponentially increase returns and to lend more on less to grow profits.<sup>68</sup> Peaking before the crisis of 2007, financial markets claimed 40 percent of all profits in the corporate sector,<sup>69</sup> providing a vivid instance of the propensity of money in capital to reproduce itself. Shorn of the regulations meant to insure bank responsibility implemented after the Great Depression (such as the Glass-Steagall Act), unchecked speculation in asset values, particularly real estate, along with a flush of new capital due to the increase in leveraging (40 to 1 after 2004 and up from the

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<sup>66</sup> Mark Gongloff, "Traders Manipulated Currency Rates to Profit Off of Clients: Report," *Huffington Post*, January 12, 2013, accessed online: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/12/currency-market-manipulation\\_n\\_3428212.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/12/currency-market-manipulation_n_3428212.html)

<sup>67</sup> Martin, *Financialization of Daily Life*, 25.

<sup>68</sup> Carmen M. Reinhart and Kenneth S. Rogoff, *This Time is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 221. David Harvey reports that the "shadow banking system" composed mainly of derivatives, the innovative financial products meant to eliminate risk by spreading it around but which ultimately would leave almost all funds and investments plagued with their contagion, grew from almost nothing in 1990 to \$250 trillion in 2005 and maybe even \$600 trillion in 2008. Nearly all of these gains, however, were either directly or indirectly obtained by the inflation of asset values or speculation on insurance contracts. Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*, 21.

<sup>69</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Freefall: America, Free Markets, and the Sinking of the World Economy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 7.

already high 29 to 1 in 2002) set off a flurry of high-risk investments, bad loans, and consumer spending all secured on the idea that home prices would never fall.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, a more concentrated banking system began to emerge, as large financial institutions swallowed smaller, local banks. Additionally, the elimination of rules on finance allowed a fusion between lending and investment firms, permitting them to create lucrative, complex, and malignant financial products and insurance commodities that turned out to be a ticking time bomb for homeowners, pension funds, municipalities, and low-level investors.<sup>71</sup> A smaller, more powerful coterie of financial institutions were playing a more aggressive and toxic game of high-stakes poker, amassing a fortune while leaving the average American (and really the rest of the world) extremely exposed and immersed in debt.

The bubble created by such financialization eventually burst and what was already happening in this game of accumulation by dispossession became simply a more obvious and pronounced exercise of Plutocratic privilege and capitalist exploitation. Between 1979 and 1997, personal bankruptcy had risen by four hundred percent.<sup>72</sup> Even as experts and officials were touting the level of economic growth connected to the housing bubble, African American households—many of whom were medium to lower

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<sup>70</sup> As Reinhart and Rogoff note, from 1996 to 2006 the price of houses in real dollars increased nearly 92 percent—more than three times the cumulative increase of 27 percent from 1890 to 1996. In the last year of the housing bubble prices soared by more than 12 percent—six times faster than the growth of GDP. Reinhart and Rogoff, *This Time is Different*, 207. All the while, the US Administration and economic leaders were arguing that this was true growth and development, ignoring all signs of an impending disaster and flexing their professional muscle in order to encourage citizens to spend, purchase, and invest (208-14).

<sup>71</sup> Stiglitz, *Freefall*, 162-3. He notes that in the years after the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act by the Gramm-Leach-Bliley bill, “the market share of the five largest banks grew from 8 percent in 1995 to 30 percent today.”

<sup>72</sup> Martin, *Financialization of Daily Life*, 31.

income—had lost somewhere between \$71 billion to \$93 billion from 1998 to 2006. By the end of 2007, as the housing market was collapsing, over 2 million families were losing their homes to foreclosure and another 4 million were in jeopardy of suffering the same fate. The Federal Reserve estimates that US households lost nearly \$11 trillion in 2008.<sup>73</sup> With real wages having remained basically stagnate since the 1970s and unemployment spiking as the economy experienced its greatest contraction since the Great Depression, compounded by decades of privatization that spurred excessive growth in healthcare costs while making insurance harder to get and more expensive, more and more families found themselves living on the brink of bankruptcy and financial ruin.

Meanwhile, however, bank CEOs and hedge fund managers were paying themselves record bonuses, a total of \$32 billion for these Wall St. executives in January of 2008 with some top figures taking home over \$1 billion in personal remuneration.<sup>74</sup> Making use of a combination of fees, rate hikes, and other nefarious tactics, banks continued to maintain profits even as they relied on a historically unprecedented transfer of public funds to support their ailing industry through the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) set up to eliminate their bad debt. TARP provided the largest financial institutions with over \$700 billion to bail them out from under the bad investments they had made and yet required no oversight of how these emergency funds were to be spent. Emboldened by this logic and the policies it supported, the ratio of CEO pay to that of the

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<sup>73</sup> Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*, 1, 6.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 21.

average worker had reached 243 to 1 by 2010.<sup>75</sup> Only exacerbating the inequalities of the past decade evidenced by the fact that in 1999 the CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch, received an income 1,400 times that of the average U.S. worker in his company and 9,571 that of the average Mexican worker,<sup>76</sup> Immanuel Saez reports that “the top 1 percent captured 93 percent of the income gains in the first year of the recovery” while the top 10 percent gained 46.3 percent of total income in 2010.<sup>77</sup> By 2012 yearly incomes for top CEOs had achieved heights it would take the average worker 3,489 years to equal.<sup>78</sup> Putting the degree of inequality in perspective, Joseph Stiglitz reports that “The top 1 percent get in one week 40 percent more than the bottom fifth receive in a year; the top 0.1 percent received in a day and a half about what the bottom 90 percent received in a year; and the richest 20 percent of income earners earn in total *after tax* more than the bottom 80 percent combined.” He also notes that, “the six heirs of the Wal-Mart empire command wealth of \$69.7 billion, which is equivalent to the wealth of the entire bottom 30% of U.S. society,” or, approximately 100 million people.<sup>79</sup> Even more, the explosion of wealth at the top has overwhelmingly resulted from dispossessing those at the bottom. With global economic growth rates of 1.4 percent in the 1980s, 1.1 percent in the 1990s, and barely achieving 1 percent since 2000, neoliberal policies have failed to create real

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<sup>75</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012), 3.

<sup>76</sup> Frank, *One Market Under God*, 7.

<sup>77</sup> Emmanuel Saez, “Striking it Richer: The Evolution of Top Incomes in the United States (Updated with 2009 and 2010 Estimates),” March 2, 2012, available at: <http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~saez/saez-UStopincomes-2010.pdf>

<sup>78</sup> Seth Borenstein, “CEO Pay: Highest Salaries Equal 3,489 Years for the Typical Worker,” *The Huffington Post*, December 25, 2012, available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/25/ceo-pay-highest-salaries-typical-workers\\_n\\_1545189.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/25/ceo-pay-highest-salaries-typical-workers_n_1545189.html)

<sup>79</sup> Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, 4, 8.

growth but have succeeded beyond imagination in achieving lucrative returns for elites in the capitalist class, especially finance, by exploiting average people and those at the bottom. The fact that neither elected officials nor the general public seem to be interested in challenging this regime of dispossession and inequality because of the supposed effect it could have on the economy evidences the degree to which or political judgment is captive to neoliberal logic.<sup>80</sup>

The second feature characteristic of societies dedicated to neoliberal ideology is a movement toward externalizing the costs of production by placing them upon the individual, the public, and the environment while privatizing profits. In keeping with its judgment, neoliberalism has excelled at shifting the costs intrinsic to the process of capital on to workers, the public, or the environment as a means of reducing expenditures and maximizing corporate returns. The effect on workers, society, and the environment have significant ramifications, and while it is not within the scope of my argument here to discuss the total environmental costs (though these are well known), I think it imperative to highlight the effect externalization has upon workers and society. Not only does capital naturally tend to reduce wages by establishing highly competitive labor markets, using unemployment and the threat of unemployment as well as political intervention to bust

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<sup>80</sup> Hannah Arendt asserts that the “enlargement of the mind” essential to political judgment requires critical thinking. “Critical thinking,” she states, “is possible only where the standpoints of all others are open to inspection.” She also adds to this quality of critical thinking the necessity of looking upon the whole of a situation and being able to assess the entirety of its effects. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 42-43, 55. The dire consequences for society when political judgment becomes captive to an ideology of the autonomous and self-regulating market are discussed by Karl Polanyi in *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

labor and union power and create reserves ready to work for lower pay,<sup>81</sup> capital also attempts to make the worker more and more responsible for obtaining the individual necessities that allow her to return to work the next day while resisting any demand to help bear the public cost. Neoliberalism has facilitated this drive to externalize, as is evident by the fact that both real wages and benefits have stagnated even as worker productivity has increased.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, decreased state revenues due to tax cuts for companies have strained public budgets, pressing them into yawning debt and forcing them to reduce welfare provisions. For average citizens, neoliberal policies have ushered in an era of mounting debt and pervasive insecurity. Additionally, concerned with their own finances, health care, education, employment, and lacking the refuge of strong public safety nets, the citizenry has become more individualized as each person struggles to meet her needs and the needs of her immediate family. The workforce and the population in general has become atomized, left on their own to reproduce themselves as labor-commodities ready for a volatile and flexible market and to pursue her own consumptive desires.<sup>83</sup> Hence, the average worker bears more of the cost of subsistence on herself even as wages decrease or stagnate, pensions dissolve, health-care coverage recedes, education becomes more costly and more necessary, and employment becomes more temporary and mobile.<sup>84</sup> The result is the cruel mutation of freedom that arises in

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<sup>81</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 784.

<sup>82</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 25.

<sup>83</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 711-24.

<sup>84</sup> For a full discussion of the effect of Neoliberalism on individual workers see Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 154. For instance, Harvey notes that informal employment (or insecure employment) rose from 29 percent to 44 percent in the 1990s while global indicators on health levels, life expectancy and infant mortality have shown losses in well-being since the 1960s.

this, to use Hannah Arendt's term, "society of laborers" established under the logic of neoliberalism and self-regulating markets.<sup>85</sup> Freedom for the vast majority, in this respect, has simply come to mean the freedom to venture into the cruel and turbulent waters of the labor market and the shopping mall of privatized goods alone.

Informed by a neoliberal consensus that relinquishes political judgment to the mechanisms of the market, life under the dominion of capital is today producing unprecedented distortions of wealth and power and establishing a pattern of grossly disjointed social relations. The world of global capital is becoming increasingly lop-sided and deeply fractured. Ordering and orchestrating life under its power and authority, the market enslaves human existence to its will and captivates our political judgment in trade for an ersatz freedom. The result on a global scale is increasing disparity between the haves and the have-nots, raising the number of those in poverty and increasing pressure on individual workers even as the wealth of those at the tope achieves record levels.<sup>86</sup> Income inequality continues to grow across the globe at rapid rates, a pattern well entrenched in the U.S. over the past 30 years. Currently, 1 in 6 Americans live in poverty as do 21.9 percent of our children.<sup>87</sup> Real median household income has declined by 8.1

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<sup>85</sup> Arendt describes the society of laborers as one in which all members have come to think of the entirety of their actions, excepting entertainment, as making a living and where no higher or more meaningful actions exist. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 5, 46.

<sup>86</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 5. He reports that the actual number of people living in poverty increased by nearly 100 million during the twentieth century, even as world income grew by an average of 2.5 percent annually.

<sup>87</sup> The poverty line for a family of 3 is \$17,916 per year and for a family of 4 is \$23,021 per year which, along with high incarceration rates (2.3 million in the US or 1 in 100 adults), likely deflates the actual poverty rate. Interestingly enough the rate of people living in poverty above 65 years of age is drastically lower, 8.7 percent, due mainly to the existence of Social Security and Medicare programs—both of which conservatives are trying to eliminate. See Carmen DeNavas-Walt, Bernadette D. Proctor, and

percent since the financial crisis and income inequality according to the CIA's GINI Index has increased to levels higher than Iran and nearly equal to Bulgaria.<sup>88</sup> Hoping to counteract the losses they have incurred, work hours per family have increased, as both spouses have joined the workforce and are working more hours for less pay. Furthermore, even opportunity has significantly declined as the lines between the elite and everyone else have solidified.<sup>89</sup> The logic that markets know better how to organize life and are self-regulating if left to work on their own has facilitated the dominion of global capital, ordering societies and communities across the planet to the pursuit of profit at the expense of people, creation, and social relations. Under capital's dominion and the political judgment of market mechanisms, more and more people find themselves inhabiting a world directed toward injustice, atomization, destruction, and instability.

While this is not to say that there is no way of resisting or no outside to the hegemony of capital, such acts of resistance often become reintegrated into the operations of capital as "lifestyle enclaves," too thinly constructed and too consumer oriented to offer a real, sustained alternative.<sup>90</sup> Also, those truly on the outside of the system face even more seemingly insurmountable obstacles in order to challenge capital. Those on

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Jessica C. Smith, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-243, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2011*, U.S. Government Printing Office (Washington, DC: 2012).

<sup>88</sup> See Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, accessed January 16, 2013: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2172rank.html>. While the GINI coefficient is a less than perfect measure of inequality, it is helpful for giving a sense of how nations compare to one another with regard to disparity they contain.

<sup>89</sup> Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, 18.

<sup>90</sup> Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*, 71-5. Capital shows a remarkable ability to allow for dissent, even as it tends to reintegrate this opposition back into its structural fold. One powerful way it does this is to encourage lifestyle enclaves rather than deep communities, providing outlets for resistance and anti-capitalist sentiment that at base function to create new markets for the revolutionist consumer.



the margins of the capitalist empire not only do not possess the power to contest the military-industrial complex of capital but even more the perpetual war they sustain with capital actually serves to continue to consolidate capital power and to provide a supplementary engine for capital growth. As is the case with the war on terror, not only do these radical operatives provide a distorted picture of the alternative to capitalism but the war they facilitate continues both to promote military investment spurring capitalist growth and expansion, and to establish a common enemy helpful for unifying even disgruntled elements of the population.

Though it appears that a different alternative or a countervailing power to challenge the sovereignty of capital and to recover the practice of political judgment is needed, it is also becoming increasingly clear that such a countervailing power cannot emerge from traditional liberal democratic procedures. Any challenge to the power of capital, as I will show in the two final sections of this chapter, faces some substantial problems that could lead us to despair. Both at the level of the state and the level of the subject, the dominion of capital has engendered alterations that leave citizens with few, if any, mechanisms for counter-acting the flows of capital and re-empowering them as political agents. It is to the transformation of the state under capital that I will now turn in order to describe why standard liberal, democratic approaches to the problems noted above will not work. I will then describe further how the shaping of political subjectivity under capital compounds the problem of resistance before concluding.

*The Consolidation of Capital Power and the Emerging Market-State*

I have argued to this point that capitalism in its neoliberal form has emerged as a new global power whose dominion orders and orchestrates human relations and existence in service to the good of maximizing profits and the pursuit of growth. In the process, coincidentally, it also redistributes wealth from the bottom to the top and creates vicious divisions between elite of business and finance and those who remain dependent upon credit and plagued by debt. But the extent of capital's power and sway over life, I think only begins to become truly apparent by, following Hannah Arendt's understanding of freedom as the "*raison d'être*" of politics,<sup>91</sup> considering the impact of the new era of global capital upon the political structure of the state itself. Since the birth of liberal political theory, while the state and the market have emerged together, it was considered to be the state's job to rein in the extremes of the market, building a protective hedge around it for the larger social good.<sup>92</sup> Liberal political theorists attempting to grapple with the problems arising in connection with global capitalism, as a result, generally look to the mechanisms of the state as the way to curb the destructive and fragmenting propensities of capital. But, as I will argue in this section, all attempts to tame the power of capital and to bring it back within the overarching objectives of the state fail to

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<sup>91</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 145.

<sup>92</sup> Hegel's political philosophy provides an example of such a liberal theory wherein the state, while relying upon the system of needs to organize civil society and to foster mutual recognition in the right of private property, also must limit the system of needs and integrate it into the larger objectives of the political body. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge Texts In the History of Political Thought, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Of course, though Hegel's political theory has been extremely influential on liberal political theory in the U.S., the main distinction between his vision of the state and that of most mainstream American theorists is that he privileges a constitutional monarchy over a more immediate democracy. To this extent, John Rawls most represents the American version of liberal political theory. See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971).

recognize the transformation that capital in neoliberal form has effected upon the nature of the state itself. Thus, given the structure of the emerging market state, the standard liberal democratic approaches to resist and counteract the trends of capitalism are doomed to miscarriage and ultimately to end either in relative acceptance of the status quo or in despair. As I will show, the problem is much deeper due to the fact that within the new form of the capitalist state what passes for democracy and the liberal institutions that frame it, i.e., the apparatuses of law and the courts, governmental offices and political parties, the media, the education system, the military, and even many religious organizations, etc. have all become integrated and subjected to the hegemonic objectives of capital and offer only limited avenues for opposing the commodification of life. Because the state itself is changing, that is, because the state is being shaped more in the image of capital and the market, not only are possibilities for liberal democratic opposition quickly receding but as politics withers and relinquishes more ground to the market fewer ways to exercise political freedom remain open and critical dispositions harder to cultivate.

The ascendancy of neoliberalism narrated above, as David Harvey has shown, has engendered a new understanding of freedom whose embodiment is at home in the market.<sup>93</sup> Privileging free enterprise and high finance, business and bank deregulation, and the disembedding<sup>94</sup> of market functions from the larger social system, the positive freedom associated with the practice of politics has been traded for the individual

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<sup>93</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 5-38.

<sup>94</sup> Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 3. A self-regulating, and totally free market, he argues, is a fiction, for it has never existed and never will because markets are by nature “embedded” within more complex social systems.

freedom of the consumer and the boundless freedom of capital to move unencumbered across the globe. In turn, the structure of the state has also come to be reconfigured to fit more neatly to this concept of freedom. The result, as the political theorist Sheldon Wolin has noted, is that “State actors have become dependent more on corporate power than on their own citizens,”<sup>95</sup> and a new world hegemonic power sovereign over nation states has begun to transform those states completely with, in Hardt and Negri’s words, “a new notion of right, or rather, a new inscription of authority and a new design of the production of norms and legal instruments of coercion that guarantee contracts and resolve conflicts.”<sup>96</sup> In short, a new capitalist state has begun to emerge, one more adapted to the needs and desires of the market and more amenable to market mechanisms, transnational corporations, global finance, technological innovation, and international production and labor flexibility, leaving fewer and fewer avenues for political action that are not subject to market wishes and run through its institutions.

To understand the new capitalist state, however, I want to take a look briefly at the form of the state from which it has emerged. In the wake of the Great Depression and the two World Wars, a model of the capitalist state arose that remained dominant in the U.S., Canada, North-western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand for the bulk of the following century. Due to the disastrous effects of the asymmetrical relations of capital in the 1920s-30s, democratic societies struggled to work out a compromise that fit with their Fordist economies. The compromise, one that dominated the past half century, was the

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<sup>95</sup> Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Expanded ed. (1960; repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 589.

<sup>96</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 9.

Keynesian Welfare Nation State (KWNS).<sup>97</sup> By aiming, within the limits of national boundaries, to provide the conditions for full employment, a thick social safety net, and programs to lift the well-being of labor, it also empowered the state to step in where markets failed in order to more broadly disperse wealth and opportunity to its citizens and to ensure the perseverance of a robust web of common goods and infrastructure.<sup>98</sup> Prompted by a confluence of economic, fiscal, political, and social crises tied to chronic stagflation, growing expenditures and shrinking tax revenues, intrinsic alienation associated with a swelling bureaucracy, and burgeoning individualism the KWNS, however, began to collapse due both to the pressure of its own weight and the internal fragmentation resulting from its inability to create real social cohesion in the face of market forces.

By the end of the 1970s, a significant crisis of the KWNS began to unfold, one that provoked the neoliberal response that developed throughout the 1980s and solidified in the “orthodoxy” of the “Washington Consensus in the 1990s.”<sup>99</sup> What created the conditions for the advent of neoliberalism is that the welfare nation-state could no longer meet the expectations it was established to fulfill and as a result began to lose its claim to legitimacy. As the constitutional law and military strategy theorist Philip Bobbitt argues,

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<sup>97</sup> Bob Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State*, 55-94. Of course, Jessop does not see this model of the state as a rigid one and understands that there is a great deal of diversity within the model, noting “how different national economies, societies and states deviate from the ideal type to give different modes of economic growth, different welfare regimes and different forms of governance within this broad ideal-typical matrix” (55). A degree of the same flexibility is also characteristic of the new form of the capitalist state, though because of its global integration the Schumpeterian Workfare Postnational Regime is by nature more unified and homogenous.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 58-61.

<sup>99</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 13.

Indeed it [has become] increasingly difficult for the nation-state to fulfill the functions it added to its portfolio when it superseded the state-nation: not simply the maintenance of an industrial war machine of immense cost that is unable to assure the physical security of its citizens, but also the maintenance of civil order by means of bargaining among constituencies, the administration of juridical norms that embodied a single national tradition, and above all the management of economic growth of the society in order to provide a continuous improvement in the material conditions of life for all classes... These tasks were the nation-state's *raison d'être*. Yet today, market regulation by the State has become unpopular, many citizens have been effectively marginalized in the political life of their societies, and private business organizations have taken the initiative regarding international development. It is they who determine whether the economic policies of a state merit confidence and credit, without which no state can develop. At the same time, there are new security demands on the State that require ever greater executive authority, secrecy, and revenue.<sup>100</sup>

That is to say, the nation-state can no longer ensure for its citizens the rights and goods it was created to provide. Failing to provide its citizens the certainty of security and protection, to restrict international intrusion, to control its own economy, to regulate the proliferation of images and ideas, and to shield its people from ecological hazards or the threat of epidemics of disease, the nation-state cannot successfully fulfill the tasks that undergird its legitimacy, resulting in its own disintegration.<sup>101</sup> What is essential to see here is that the nation-state is both no longer the functional form of the state and neither can it respond adequately to the broader social demands being made upon it. Indeed, it is being eclipsed by a new constitutional arrangement, one wherein the economy plays a much larger role.

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<sup>100</sup> Philip Bobbitt, *Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 208.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

Out of the nation-state that dominated the past century, a new form of the state is emerging: the “market-state,”<sup>102</sup> equipped with its own means of attempting to mediate the demands of capital and the social pressures generated by the market. “[W]hat is tendentially replacing the Keynesian welfare national state,” according to Marxist state theorist Bob Jessop, “is a Schumpeterian workfare post-national regime” (SWPR).<sup>103</sup> This new form is Schumpeterian to the extent that it attempts to promote innovation and flexibility in an overall open economy by intervening on the supply-side to increase and strengthen competitiveness in given economic spaces. It is workfare in the sense that it submits social policy to the needs and desires of the economic interests of business and finance. Hence, while the “KWNS tried to extend the social rights of its citizens, the SWPR is more concerned to provide welfare services that benefit business and thereby demotes individual needs to second place.” Next, it is post-national in that it makes recourse to multilevel and multigovernance institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, EU, or WTO. And finally, it is regime-like to the degree that it relies on the “increased importance of non-state mechanisms in compensating for market failures and inadequacies in the delivery of state-sponsored economic and social policies,” resulting in

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 17. Bobbitt’s thesis argues that due to innovations that brought an end to the long war, “The nation-state is dying, but this only means that, as in the past, a new form is being born. This new form, the *market-state*, will ultimately be defined by its response to the strategic threats that have made the nation-state no longer viable.” He later defines the market-state as “the emerging constitutional order that promises to maximize the opportunity of its people, tending to privatize many state activities and making representative government more responsive to the market” (912). Yet, because Bobbitt tends to read the state as an entity primarily formed by war and the military-technological advancements that accompany war, he does not consider, to my mind, the degree to which the forces of capital influence the state and the wars that state fights.

<sup>103</sup> Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State*, 247.

a “hallowing out of national states.”<sup>104</sup> The end result is a state that is freer for capital but offers its citizens fewer and fewer opportunities for political engagement and to play a role in constructing the way of life they will live.

Under the sovereignty of capital, as Bobbitt observes, this new market-state is characterized by the fact that

capital markets have to become less regulated in order to attract capital investment and that capital has to become more global in order to achieve the maximum returns on investment; that labor markets have to become more flexible in order to compete with other, foreign labor markets and to keep jobs at home that depend upon producing products at a cost that can compete with the products of states that have lower labor costs; that if the world economy is to grow, access to all markets has to be assured and trade has to become less regulated; that a state’s trade policy will have to become more free if that state’s goods are to be able to penetrate foreign markets and thus participate in this growth; that government subsidies, spending, and welfare programs have to be managed in order to permit more investment in infrastructure and to allow greater private saving (which will lower the cost of investment); and that tax policy has to provide incentives for growth in order to attract enterprise and to maximize innovation and entrepreneurship.<sup>105</sup>

Bobbitt’s summary of the new capitalist state needs only to be tweaked by recognizing that the concentrated power of international finance and multinational corporations have tended to guarantee large subsidies for themselves as well as military protection for their investments while denigrating spending on domestic infrastructure and encouraging monetary and fiscal policy that fosters more dependence on debt instead of private saving. Liberating finance and business from its obligations to society, late, global capitalism generates freedom for these institutions even as it creates insecurity and

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 250-54.

<sup>105</sup> Bobbitt, *Shield of Achilles*, 667. In short, as David Harvey has put it, “...the role of the government [is] to create good business climate rather than look to the needs and well-being of the population at large.” Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 48.



captivity for the larger population. To this extent, as Robert Cox has suggested, the proclivity of capital to dislodge itself from the container of politics and to establish its own dominion can be seen in the fact that “international finance is the preeminent agency of conformity to world-hegemonic order and the principle regulator of political and productive organization of a hegemonic world economy.”<sup>106</sup> A vivid display of the transformation of the state under capital was evident in the response to the Great Crisis of 2008, wherein the fictional values produced through innovations of the financial sector creating the investment bubble were actualized by the mechanisms of the state at the cost of its citizens. The newly emerging relationship between the state and capital has become solidified and, while discontent or ire with “greedy” individuals and companies may ripple through the ranks of the media, few levers and little residual political will exists for citizens to ply in the hope of making more systemic change.

Though many would acknowledge problems intrinsic to the market state, most conceptions of how to address these issues remain, to my mind at least, fairly cosmetic. For instance, conservatives are generally happy to embrace the neoliberal state, and only seek to supplement it with a purpose-giving, if often ill-fitted, civil religion and popular morality.<sup>107</sup> However, though liberals remain troubled by the consequences of a capitalism that has escaped its container, at the same time, they do not always perceive the fact that their appeals to state mechanisms to assuage the vagaries of the market are at

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<sup>106</sup> Robert W. Cox, *Production, Power, and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History*, New Directions in World Politics: Power and Production 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 267.

<sup>107</sup> Brown, “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization,” 696-705. A similar consideration of the confluence between Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism can be found in David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (New York: Oxford Press, 2005), 183-212.

odds with the new configuration of the state they tend to broadly accept. As Wendy Brown puts it,

...globalized market forces and neoliberal political rationality are already threatening liberal democratic constitutionalism with obsolescence. Thus, as the principles are attacked from one direction, the institutions are undermined from another, at which point the left—without an independent vision of its own—often finds itself in the peculiar position of being little more than an advocate for a declining liberal democracy. In the absence of a substantive left vision, an absence that inevitably breeds a politics of reaction, the neoconservative moral agenda and contempt for civil rights would seem to push many liberals and leftists either into a competing moralism or into repulsing all moral claims in the public and the social with civil libertarianism and a hollow secularism. Similarly, the neoliberal dismantling of public provisions and services often pushes liberals and leftists into an anachronistic welfare statism.<sup>108</sup>

Because governmental solutions aimed at assuaging inequality continue to trend toward bureaucratic inefficiency and/or ineptitude, they are completely impotent to thwart the emergence of the market-state. A society which has become “completely Weberian,” will not find in more bureaucracy the cure for its life-threatening condition.<sup>109</sup> As a result, “The most powerful undemocratic force in human history appears here to stay—this is the fundamental left and liberal predicament today, a predicament that haunts our theoretical and political practices concerned with freedom, equality, justice, and more.”<sup>110</sup>

Given the fact that the SWPR has displaced the KWNS, the proponents of the liberal welfare state are bound to experience continual disappointment and frustration,

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<sup>108</sup> Brown, “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization,” 710.

<sup>109</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 109. Readers who are familiar with this important text will recognize that MacIntyre makes this statement at the beginning of the central chapter in the book. Sans a collective view of the common good and a positive vision of freedom, MacIntyre asserts there are only two possible ways forward for a society trapped within the “iron cage” of management and bureaucracy that has filled the void left by the absence of these unifying goods: Nietzsche or Aristotle.

<sup>110</sup> Brown, “At the Edge,” 564.

leaving them susceptible to pessimism if not complete apathy or increasing acceptance assuaged by market moralities they can feel good about, i.e., fair trade, organic, or social entrepreneurship which really only serve to open up new markets for capital.<sup>111</sup> The attempt to curb the inequalities of the market with strong state programs is no longer possible, for bureaucracy is both too large and too alien, and due to privatization the state itself is becoming the property of the elite. New, more efficient and streamlined managerial structures of government are replacing the bloated bureaucracy of the welfare state, as think tanks, advocacy and special interest groups, lobbyists, and PACs or now SuperPACs do the work for citizens. Money directs politics, for as sociologist Theda Skocpol has observed, “The most privileged Americans can now organize and contend largely among themselves, without regularly engaging the majority of citizens.”<sup>112</sup> Like Plato in the *Republic* or Augustine in *City of God* reaching for the eternal in a world of decay, the liberal calls for financial regulation, limiting the power of corporations, labor rights and fair wages, income equality and progressive taxation, and state provisions for healthcare, retirement, and social safety nets are the most recent instance of the bemoaning of the fact that the state is degenerating. Hence, a political movement capable of resisting the dominion of capital must come to grips with the fact that the lines of action endemic to the KWNS no longer exist and the need for a more radical approach is necessary if a politics embodying freedom of more just arrangements is to emerge.

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<sup>111</sup> As I have already noted, Jeffrey Stout's latest book, *Blessed Are the Organized*, is one example of such pessimism. See note 20 in the introduction.

<sup>112</sup> Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 178.

The transformation of the state under capital has destroyed the avenues for political participation and the political objectives that prevailed within the welfare, nation state of the past century. At the same time it has worked to reshape the state, moreover, the dominion of capital has also exerted itself upon the consciousness of its subjects. It is to the depoliticized formation of human subjectivity under capital that I now turn to in the final section of this chapter.

### *The Hegemony of Capital and the Formation of Post-political Subjectivity*

As I have shown, a transformation has occurred at the level of the state, consolidating sovereignty in the market and making attempts to challenge the dominion of capital less possible. But the full effect of the power of capital can be found in its formation of the subject, that is, the consciousness and mental constructs, and the social imaginary of its citizens.<sup>113</sup> Corresponding to the transformation of the state, a refashioning of the citizen has also emerged with the advent of capital's reign. The citizen-subject has been replaced by the consumer/entrepreneurial-subject, a subject reconfigured and reconditioned to participate in market practices and to devalue the freedom of politics. Depoliticized and pacified through consumption and spectacle while activated solely with a sense of her own enterprise, the subjects of capital have become conditioned to relinquish the freedom of political processes and public life. Abdicating

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<sup>113</sup> I take the term "social imaginaries" from Charles Taylor who discusses this notion in chapter 4, "Modern Social Imaginaries," of his monumental work, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 159-211, and his *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2004). Taylor uses this term in order to capture the notion of the range of possibilities available within a specific historical context limited and formed by the material conditions and the conceptual ideals of a community that together nurture its vision of the past, present and future.

political judgment to the market and investing political will in the interest of the economy, these subjects are submerged in a false freedom of commodification and self-enterprise that ultimately leave them plagued by insecurity, instability, meaninglessness, loneliness, and the daily routines of procuring the necessities of existence.

The relation between the constitution of the state and that of the individual is as old as political philosophy. Both Plato, in the *Republic*, and Aristotle, in *The Politics*, thought that the city and the citizen, or the human, reflected one another.<sup>114</sup> The human was, on a smaller scale, configured and ordered to the polis. Marxist scholars such as Louis Althusser and Fredric Jameson have reminded us of this point by drawing our attention to the way capital has shaped the dispositions, logic, and consciousness of those who inhabit it.<sup>115</sup> The commodity form of capital I discussed at the outset of this chapter is not only the manifestation of the structure of material and social reality, but it also shapes the subject herself, configuring her own interpretation and conscious interaction with and intuition of the world. *Form* in this sense names the configuration of the interrelation between the human and her world, such that both are shaped by their interaction with one another (the natural metabolism<sup>116</sup> of human existence), creating a

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<sup>114</sup> Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube and rev. C.D.C. Reeve in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), books IV and V; Aristotle, *The Politics and the Constitution of Athens*, ed. Stephen Everson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 195.

<sup>115</sup> See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards and Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy" and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 85-126; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); and Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

<sup>116</sup> I think it is clear that Marx's use of this term (*Capital Volume I*, 283) derives from his read of Feuerbach, who reminds us that "we are what we eat." David Harvey, however, goes on to explain the term by asserting that metabolism concerns the intimate connection of human life with nature wherein human

way of life complete with dispositions and corresponding practices and material, social, and political conditions. In relation to the structures of capital accumulation and commodity production, a corresponding subjectivity is fashioned that resonates with a capitalist way of life, especially as it becomes subjugated to the microphysics of high finance.

To understand the way in which capital shapes the subject in conformity to the interests of the dominant capitalist class, Althusser discusses the role of a cluster of flexible institutions that operate intimately upon the individual, personally forming her and fashioning her dispositions and consciousness. He calls these institutions “ideological State apparatuses” (ISAs) and distinguishes them from “(repressive) State apparatuses” which are more immediately connected to the exercise of force by the state. Whereas the latter are comprised of the police, the government, the army, the courts, the prisons, etc., ISAs operate with the arena of civil society and “the private domain” to shape and create the soul in conformity to the ideology of the dominant class.<sup>117</sup> Institutions such as the church, the family, the media, pop culture, and most importantly for Althusser the educational system make up the cluster of apparatuses that operate to form the consciousness of individuals. Through the process of what he refers to as “interpellation,”

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ideas are shape nature through human action and labor but also because human existence lives off of and within the energy provided by nature our own life is deeply shaped by the world around us. Ideas and material reality cannot be separated from one another for humans. Harvey, *Companion to Marx's Capital*, 114.

<sup>117</sup> Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” 96-7. As Pierre Bourdieu has observed, there can be a tendency in Althusser’s concept of interpellation to become too mechanical in the way it views internalized domination. Nonetheless, I think it helpful for beginning to understand how the internal dispositions of the soul are structured and conditioned by the apparatuses of the state and the economy.

Althusser asserts, these apparatuses name, define, identify, or constitute the subject, “hailing” her and constructing her in this identification as a subject who knows herself, others, and the world within the frame of the dominant ideology.<sup>118</sup> As the institutions that shape social and familial relations as well as convictions and commitments, and train persons in the norms, expectations, and practices that orient them to a specific way of being, these apparatuses configure their consciousness to that way of being, defining their identity. By setting the frame for apperception and by determining even on the most intimate level how the individual understands herself and her world, she is reproduced, like all the other conditions of capitalist production, as a subject. Transposed into Foucault’s terms, by governing the production and reproduction of life, these apparatuses actively form the individual’s self-consciousness (and subconscious) as well as her agency. Channeling, teasing, and manufacturing desire and structuring performances, modes of activity, and outlets of expression, a consciousness congenial to capital is

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 117-18. Foucault’s work on biopower and the instruments of biopolitics, while differing in certain respects, is rather proximate, I think, to the way ISAs for Althusser shape and determine the subject. Foucault discusses the notions of biopower and biopolitics in the lectures presented in *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 239-63; and *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2008). While Althusser’s notion of interpellation provides a helpful condensation of the way subjectivity is always and already shaped by larger, socio-political and material conditions and forces, Foucault’s later work arising from these investigations seems to offer some residual space for the agency of an autonomous subject both in her participation in the practices of biopolitics and in the possibility of resistance through other technologies of the self. See Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1981-1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005). For a helpful discussion of the development of Foucault’s later thought and the transition from his interest in biopower and biopolitics to the arts of living and technologies of the self, see Eric Paras, *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge* (New York: Other Press, 2006).

molded.<sup>119</sup> Accordingly, intrinsic to the process of the commodity-form of life under capitalism not only does a new world of social and material relations come into existence in the market, but a corresponding subjectivity emerges as well, a subjectivity that reifies the dominant ideology.<sup>120</sup>

Working from Althusser's insights and expanding upon them in ways that follow Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, Marxist philosopher Kenneth Surin offers a helpful analysis of how capital today operates through a "system of regulation" to determine the subjectivity of those under its authority. Consistent with its mode of production and regime of accumulation, he notes, capital's system of regulation governs both the social conditions of the sites of production and consumption and the various apparatuses that form a society at the level of actors and constituents.<sup>121</sup> While on the one hand, he points to the "social mode of economic regulation" to indicate the specific types of jobs and roles that are possible within a society orchestrated by a capitalist mode of production and which serve to establish the more formal relations necessary for its operation, on the other hand, Surin also highlights the "mode of societal regulation" as the cluster of apparatuses that function within this system to "normalize" capitalism as a mode of

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<sup>119</sup> For a discussion of the way media and advertising have shaped the consciousness of America, see Stuart Ewen and Elizabeth Ewen, *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

<sup>120</sup> While I believe there is good reason to eschew the teleological and humanist aspects of his work, Georg Lukács' discussion of "reification" also points us, within a broadly Marxist perspective to the process of the complimentary fashioning of the subject and objective reality in a unified life-world. As Lukács explains, "Just as the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher and higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefully and more definitively into the consciousness of man." Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (1971; repr., Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 93.

<sup>121</sup> Surin, *Freedom Not Yet*, 37.



production and regime of accumulation.<sup>122</sup> Exercising its influence through both the apparatuses of force and ideology, capitalism configures the life-world of its inhabitants by establishing the possibilities of expression for the ensemble of concepts, events, and conditions that determine the shape and expression of their lives. In doing so, capital's reign seeps into the personages and agencies of its constituent population, reproducing them as concrete individualized subjects.<sup>123</sup> While this is not to say that all personages, and the assemblage of concepts, effects, dispositions, and expressivities, produced and reproduced under capitalism are exactly the same, it is to point out that within the texture of crisscrossed ensembles and expressivities that are the fabric of the subject some general and shared themes do emerge. Consequently, the commodity form of life connected to a capitalist mode of domination manages "to create a doxa or common sense in which any serious expectations regarding alternatives to capitalism are discounted from the outset, so that the accumulation of capital seems an entirely normal state of affairs for the overwhelming majority of citizens," articulating a subject who in turn hypostatizes the capitalist constellation of structuring practices and their logic.<sup>124</sup> In this

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 36-38.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 42-52.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 38. It is important to note here that Surin does not think that the mode of societal regulation is monolithic in every place but instead recognizes that it differs according to context and location. Hence, a mode of societal regulation advantageous to capital can function in societies and communities of various levels of technological and industrial development. Nonetheless, a certain homogenization with respect to the relations between these communities under a global capitalist mode of production is evident in the pursuit of profit and the commodity-form of life. As a result, a broad consensus pertaining to the normality of the capitalist system has begun to emerge across the planet (141). Furthermore, as Vincent Miller has observed, theological critiques of capitalism that challenging its ideology or the theories of political economy are ultimately incapable of counteracting the real power of capital because it does not so much operate as an idea or a theory as it does a habit that is practiced and repeated in the very daily exercises of consumption through which we satisfy our basic needs. Miller, *Consuming Religion*, 38.

way, capitalism shapes the political subjectivity of those who inhabit a form of life determined by it. Capital operates at the level of dispositions, imagination, emotion, expectations, and intellect, resonating<sup>125</sup> through one's entire being and consciousness in a manner that shapes the production of life itself. Having escaped its container and obtained an unimpeded capacity to determine life, it produces not only commodities but also subjects complete with needs, social relations, bodies, and minds fit to pursue and reproduce the political and social conditions conducive to its regime of accumulation.<sup>126</sup> The (re)production of such a subjectivity is key to establishing and maintaining its claim to totality.

Through interpellation the order of society in commodity exchange becomes ingrained in the very structure of human consciousness and imagination and assimilates the individual to the life-world of commodification. What is critical to see here is that through the ISA's of the emerging market-state under neoliberal, corporate ideology a transformation also occurs within the very consciousness of the subject, fashioning her accordingly. Hence, the transformation of the state under the logic of neoliberalism, I described above, is matched by a corresponding transformation of the subject whose

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<sup>125</sup> William Connolly offers an insightful discussion of the "resonance machine" of evangelical Christianity and capitalism in chapter two of *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 39-67. Connolly describes the notion of the resonance machine as the complex interaction and mutual infiltration of "spiritual sensibilities, economic presumptions, and state priorities" in the assemblage of "moving complex" (39). As the elements of this assemblage "fold, bend blend, emulsify, and resolve incompletely into each other," they converge to engender a "resonance machine that... infiltrates the logic of perception and inflects the understanding of economic interests" by conjoining a shared "spiritual disposition to existence" (39-41).

<sup>126</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 32. Expanding on Foucault's notion of biopower, Hardt and Negri note that "Biopower thus refers to a situation in which what is directly at stake in power is the production and reproduction of life itself." And they continue, acknowledging that this implies that "Power is thus expressed as a control that extends throughout the depths of the consciousness and bodies of the population—and at the same time across the entirety of social relations" (24).

political will and political judgment are being formed through the newly established ISA's of the market-state. The prevalence of this subjectivity presents another critical element of capital hegemony that solidifies its reign against standard liberal attempts to rebalance power and to recover politics. As subjects reproduced in the form of atomized individuals, disconnected from one another and trained for commodity production and consumption, capitalist subjects are simply not constituted to engage in the collective activity of politics or the freedom of public life. To this extent, the transformation of subjectivity under capital serves as a critical piece in solidifying its dominion, a transformation most explicitly articulated in Margaret Thatcher's comment that "Economics are the method... but the object is to change the soul."<sup>127</sup> In its hegemony over human life and relations, capital extends its influence on practices, expectations, activity, significance, thought, imagination, and even self-consciousness.<sup>128</sup>

So what is the constitution of the subjectivity that has emerged under the neoliberal ascendancy of the market over politics and society? Within this context, there

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<sup>127</sup> Quoted in Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 23. Harvey also reports that Thatcher similarly claimed that there was "...no such thing as society, only individual men and women." Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (1944; repr., Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001), 3. The thesis of Polanyi's study in this volume is to directly challenge the ideological and historical utopianism implicit in the notion of a self-regulating, free market. Indeed, he shows the degree to which this utopianism so strained the social life of Europe that it helped to create the conditions that precipitated the rise of Fascism, leading to the Second World War. A self-regulating, and totally free market, he argues, is a fiction, for it has never existed and never will. Furthermore, attempts to extract the economy from its embeddedness in society, politics, and religion inevitably serves to create catastrophe, instability, and violence.

<sup>128</sup> Working from Marx consideration of "base" and "superstructure" while not falling prey to crude forms of economism, Raymond Williams reminds us that the hegemony of capital, while certainly employing an ideology—one especially manifest in neoliberal theory, "is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming." Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977), 110. For Marx's discussion of "base" and "superstructure", see Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 175n35.

are two primary and complementary manifestations of the transformation of the subject as citizen under what one eminent political theorist has called the “inverted totalitarianism” of capital.<sup>129</sup> Correlated with the emerging market-state, wherein capitalism has escaped its container and overdetermines the shape of the state, an associated “deracination of the classical political subject, that is, the Citizen Subject” has also occurred, giving rise to the first manifestation of the new subject compatible with ascendancy of economic and corporate power.<sup>130</sup> The citizen, who had emerged within the limits and possibilities for political action since the revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and through the state-nation and nation-state formations of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, no longer has a place or the avenues and vehicles through which to engage a sovereignty that resides completely within the market. The citizen subject, as a result, has waned within the “postpolitical” conjuncture of power, knowledge, and action that characterize global capital, giving rise to the consumer subject. The citizen subject, with her sense of what it meant to act politically, to decide on the goods for a people, to discern ways forward, to exercise authority, etc. has receded just as the possibilities and channels of political action have disappeared or been closed off.<sup>131</sup> The demise of politics with the advent of the sovereignty of capital, that is to say, has evinced a corresponding demise of the citizen subject, forming in its stead a politically pacified, de-democratized, and disempowered consumer/enterprising subject.

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<sup>129</sup> Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 594.

<sup>130</sup> Surin, *Freedom Not Yet*, 30.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

A collective existence dominated by commodification, engenders de-politicized individuals by disabling political action and transforming it into spectacle and by displacing political judgment with market solutions.<sup>132</sup> In the vacuum created by the demise of political subjects disposed to deliberation, action, and the freedom of collective discernment, these individuals can only conceive of politics as something denigrated to the level of entertainment and partisan theater. Writing on the transformation of the political subject, Surin notes, “In the place of the Citizen Subject posited as an ideal by the liberal-democratic political systems of the past two centuries by and large now stands a new kind of ideal subject, to wit, a consumer subject cajoled and tutored in this country by Disney, Fox News, and *USA Today*.”<sup>133</sup> Conformed to the reign of capital sovereignty and oriented by the activity of consumption, he adds, the notion of political engagement has been reduced to “the mere management of voter opinion, involving primarily the mass media-focused orchestration of ‘hot botton’ issues capable of mobilizing largely docile electorates.”<sup>134</sup> Consumer political subjects are enticed by campaigns the way they are enchanted by product packaging and elect officials in the same way they choose between brands of fabric softener. Such “low-information voters” become accustomed to relinquishing political judgment and instead attuning their political agency to market preferences and the interests of capital elites.<sup>135</sup> By allowing themselves to be easily manipulated by political commercials and campaign slogans from both the right and the

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<sup>132</sup> On spectacle, see Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, rev. ed. (1977; repr., Detroit, MI: Black & Red, 2010), and on de-politicization see Wendy Brown, “American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization,” 704.

<sup>133</sup> Surin, *Freedom Not Yet*, 31.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

left, they fail to perceive the fact that the real difference between these two party-brands has eroded due to their mutual dedication to market ideology. A “pacified and neutered citizenry” develops within the wizened political realm of the market-state, characterized by its lack of action and real participation and for whom “democracy is equated with the existence of formal rights, especially private property rights; with the market; and with voting.”<sup>136</sup>

The complement of this consumer subject, and really the flip-side of it, is her enterprise subjectivity, wherein she conceives of herself in terms of what Foucault calls “capital-ability.” Each individual is not only a consumer, but she is also an object of capital, appearing to herself as a sort of enterprise for herself, to the extent that her body and her activity are the capital she freely brings to the market and therefore must cultivate. That is to say, each individual is an economic entrepreneur, an atomized object of her own capital who must prepare herself and sell herself, or her abilities, on the market.<sup>137</sup> The active side of the consumer subject, under a capitalist order, is the enterprising subject who in this respect views herself as an individual commodity of human capital but who bears no real interest in the political even while, at the same time, her formation as human capital becomes a primary concern of the market-state. Looking out for herself and acting in accord with her own best interest, she must prepare herself

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<sup>136</sup> Brown, “American Nightmare,” 709, 703. Along similar lines, earlier in the essay Brown writes, “Neoliberal de-democratization produces a subject who may have no such interests [in contrast to the agenda of corporations and finance], who may be more desirous of its own subjection and complicit in its own subordination than any democratic subject could be said to be” (702). Similarly, Sheldon Wolin, commenting on the “anti-democratic culture” accompanying “the emergence of capitalism as a system of power dominated by huge conglomerations that dispensed radically unequal rewards,” notes that this has had a profound effect upon the citizen who recognizes this anti-democratic climate but senses there is little she can do to change it. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 597-601.

<sup>137</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 225-26.

for the market with the necessary skills, education, social aptitude, etc. so that she will be able to find a place within the capitalist order and make a living. Her aim is to become a productive member of society, and this implies that she must view herself as an enterprise, as an object of her own human capital bearing the responsibility upon herself to prepare herself for the job market, the only realm of human activity that has meaning.

The resulting consequence of the prevalence of a commodity form of life and the advent of this corresponding subjectivity within Western liberal democracies such as the U.S. is a trend toward individualization, alienation, and de-democratization. If, as sociologist Robert Putnam has argued, increasing individualization and the erosion of social fabric has become more characteristic of capitalist societies, then it has been accompanied by a prevailing sense of alienation, disempowerment, and disillusionment with the political process as an avenue to make real changes.<sup>138</sup> Market solutions eschew any need for politics. While individualization prevails, a diminished view of the individual proliferates, one in which she is seen to be merely a consumer and an object of capital. Considering themselves to be solely consumers and entrepreneurs, these individuals relinquish the greater part of their dignity and freedom to the governance and administration of the newly emerging capitalist state. And finally, as efficiency, effectiveness, and profit displace democratic procedures and accountability, a Plutocracy

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<sup>138</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000). According to Wendy Brown, the sense of alienation and disempowerment that accompany the hegemony of capital are the fertile ground for neoconservatism because, as she notes, it is “born in part as a response to capitalism’s erosion of meaning and morality.” Brown, “American Nightmare,” 699.

in which elites operate beyond the reach of accountability becomes the dominant mode of de-democratized politics.<sup>139</sup>

The withered state is rife with withered subjects, ones that have returned full circle out of a sphere of political freedom to an individualized and insipid freedom of consumer choice and self-enterprise. Atomized and disempowered, these subjects are no longer equipped to consider higher goods or interested in the quality of freedom enjoyed within collectively determined ways of life. As a result, they are plagued by the apathy, alienation, and despair that accompany an existence solely focused on the satisfaction of superficially manufactured needs. The wizened state of the political subject under the “new systemization of the world itself” has been presciently described by Fredric Jameson, who is worth quoting at length:

For in the later stages of monopoly or postindustrial capitalism not only the multiplicity of small business units, but also distribution, and ultimately the last free-floating elements of the older commercial and cultural universe, are now assimilated into a single all-absorbing mechanism. Now, when the entire business system with its projections in government and in the military and judicial branches depends for its very existence on the automatic sale of products which no longer correspond to any kind of biological or indeed social need and which are moreover for the most part identical with each other, marketing psychology obliges it to complete its conquest of the world by reaching down into the last private zones of individual life, in order to awaken the artificial needs around which the system revolves. Thus the total organization of the economy ends up by alienating the very language and thoughts of its human population, and by dispelling the last remnant of the older autonomous subject or ego: advertising, market research, psychological testing, and a host of other sophisticated techniques of mystification now complete a

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<sup>139</sup> Discussing de-democratization, Wendy Brown limns these four elements associated with the rise of neoliberalism and neoconservatism. See Brown, “American Nightmare,” 703-05. Similarly, Jeffery Stout points to the lack of accountability for elites pervasive in American political culture, naming this element as the most serious threat to democracy our country faces. See Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized*, xv.



thorough *planification* of the public, and encourage the illusion of a life-style while disguising the disappearance of subjectivity and private life in the old sense. Meanwhile, what remains of the subjective, with its illusions of autonomy and its impoverished satisfactions, its ever diminishing images of happiness, is no longer able to distinguish between external suggestion and internal desire, is incapable of drawing a line between the private and the institutionalized, and finds itself therefore wholly delivered over to objective manipulation.<sup>140</sup>

The depoliticized consumer subjects of capitalist order do not know the freedom of political action, and they have become completely amenable to living a diminished and disfigured existence. Self-consciously conformed to capital's dominion they are content to remain focused on procuring the necessities of life, concerned more with making a living than on the more meaningful things that would make freedom of the political realm worth pursuing. Similarly, because they lack a political consciousness dedicated to the activity of more meaningful engagements, they settle for the cheap satisfaction found in entertainment and consumer goods and resign themselves to a superficial and shallow way of life bereft of depth and the collective action necessary to achieving higher goods.<sup>141</sup> Such individuals lack the political will to challenge the structure of capitalist society and remain disempowered to determine their own lives and the collective good. Similarly, they lack the critical capacity for political judgment to contest the disparity of market allocations and, therefore, remain captive to its injustices and its mechanisms of discernment. With respect to both political will and political judgment, capital and its accompanying neoliberal ideology configure subjects resonate with its interests and with its logic, solidifying its dominion in human consciousness and dispositions.

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<sup>140</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 35-6.

<sup>141</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 5, 46; and Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 208.

## *Conclusion*

Life under the dominion of late capitalism is increasingly becoming homogenized as a result of the alienation of political judgment and will which now reside completely in the global market. As subjects of the estranged power of their labor and their congealed consumer desires, the citizens of the new capitalist state bow to the will of an economy that is no longer limited or checked by the greater goods of collective life. Market sovereignty operates with an idolatrous power that remains for the most part unchallenged, fashioning the state and its subjects according to its own image. Expanding its reach and the extent of its power both on the level of the state and the subject, market rationality more and more seems to impose its order in a totalizing quest for supremacy.<sup>142</sup> Characteristic of the homogenization of life under capital, however, is a return to necessity for the vast majority and exclusion from meaningful participation in the freedom of political judgment. Meanwhile, an increasingly wealthy and powerful elite operate above the reach of accountability. Where market growth has become the sole good, depoliticization and meaninglessness prevail, squelching discourse on other goods. Capital as an empire creates for itself a “smooth world,” wherein it determines differences, allocates energies, and produces its own resolutions.<sup>143</sup>

The evisceration of politics by the sovereignty of an externalized and alien market tempts even critics to simply go along, if disparagingly, with what appears to be the

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<sup>142</sup> Brown, “The Sacred, the Secular, and the Profane,” 103-104.

<sup>143</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, xiii.

inevitable trajectory of history. Because of the transformations of the state and the subject under neoliberal capitalism, the possibilities of holding officials and elites accountable, of addressing and resolving wrongs, or working for more just arrangements—all the objectives that are supposed to be connected to a democratic form of politics—are becoming harder and harder to enact. As a result, it is easy to believe that the way things are under capitalism is the way they ought to be, and that things cannot be otherwise. Indeed, as Fredric Jameson has commented, “It is [now] easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism.”<sup>144</sup> To the extent that this seems true for those under capital, they remain political subjects captive to its history and time. To imagine a different future, one in which the freedom of political judgment and will is recovered from the hold of capital, therefore, the hope for change must spring from the possibilities opened up by new political subjects shaped by an alternative time of judgment and resonant to a different will. Something more than the standard liberal approaches to recovering democracy and readjusting the current system is necessary. For as Louis Althusser observes in his “Preface to *Capital*,” to truly challenge the reign of capital requires “a real *rupture*, a real *revolution* in their consciousness.”<sup>145</sup> But, as I will argue, if such a revolution is not to devolve into violence, chaos, and destruction, then it must follow a new *mode* of revolution established by and in the transforming work of God. In short, political hope must emerge from apocalyptic political subjects whose alternative mode of judgment is embodied in the binding and loosing of the church. It is

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<sup>144</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Future City,” *New Left Review* 21 (May/June 2003): 76.

<sup>145</sup> Louis Althusser, “Preface to *Capital* Volume One,” in “*Lenin and Philosophy*” and *Other Essays*, 66.

the possibility of this new time of judgment, exercised in binding and loosing, and manifest in the work of congregation based community organizing that will constitute the theme of the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Redeeming Time from Capital:**

#### **New Political Subjects and the Practice of *Contretemps***

With the sovereignty and dominion of capital in view, I now want to turn my attention to the way in which churches participating in the work of community organizing offer a unique mode of resistance. While capital, as I have shown, has managed broadly to capture the collective political will and the logic of political judgment, I will argue that the apocalyptic orientation of these communities endows them with a countervailing power to resist its dominion. Comprising a countervailing force, these congregations rely upon the practice of binding and loosing which springs from the advent of the new age initiated in the event of Christ in order to enact an alternative mode of political judgment. At the heart of congregation-based community organizing, then, is the practice of *contretemps*,<sup>1</sup> an alternative mode of political deliberation embodied by subjects apocalyptically oriented to the transformation of time in Christ. As an activity that operates within the opening and qualitative transformation of time initiated by Christ, congregations that participate in organizing recover the use of time from a temporality held captive to capital exchange, accumulation, and finance. In doing so, I will argue, they redeem time from capital and employ the practices of the church to work for justice, reconciliation, and ultimately the synchronization and conformity of humanity to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida introduces this term in *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge Classics, 2006), 96.

I begin this chapter where I left off in the last, but I go further by analyzing how the de-politicized subjectivity and the diminished life that have become prevalent under the reign of capital are the result of the homogenization of time. Capital's quantification of time not only regulates and orders objective reality, but it also solidifies itself within one's dispositions and consciousness, configuring political subjects under the law of financialization and according to the experience that time is money. Any challenge to the hegemony of capital, therefore, must operate as a qualitative transformation of time if it is to offer a real alternative politic. I then proceed to show how the work of the congregations and communities that comprise NC United Power present such a challenge by contesting the time of exchange and accumulation with a different experience of time given to them for *use* in an alternative process of political judgment oriented to justice. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, I provide a theological understanding of the granular activity of NC United Power to enact an alternative mode of political judgment. As the practice of *contretemps*, I will show how this activity derives from the transformation of time and subjectivity cultivated in the church and embodied socio-politically in the *use*-time of the ecclesial practice of binding and loosing.

### *Time, Money, and Subjectivity*

In the chapter on money in the *Grundrisse*, Marx states that for capitalist societies "the determination of time remains, of course, essential" because the key to the entire order is the "economization of time." At its core, then, he summarizes, "all economy

ultimately reduces itself” to the “[e]conomy of time.”<sup>2</sup> Such is the fundamental law of capital. Indeed, the key to the hegemony of capital is in the way it captures time by quantifying it and ordering it through monetization. Simply put, “time is money,” an axiom popularized by Benjamin Franklin but which also designates the way in which capital has achieved its unrivalled dominion over the state and the subject, capturing political will and judgment.<sup>3</sup> In order to better understand how capital captures time and thereby establishes its reign within the subjectivity of individuals and over social arrangements, however, I want to take a closer look at the temporal workings of capital to see how it succeeds in dislocating time for the purpose of accumulation.<sup>4</sup> Given that, according to Giorgio Agamben, “every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time,” my analysis of the time of capital will not only seek to provide a critical understanding of the disjointed nature of capitalist culture, but it will also argue following Agamben that “no new culture is possible without an alteration in this experience.” In short, my analysis of the hegemony of capital over time will show how

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 172-73. Commenting on Marx’s notion that all economy is an economy of time, Daniel Bensaïd states that “Capital is a specific, contradictory conceptual organization of social time,” therefore, “the category of time is at the heart of the critique of political economy.” Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique*, trans. Gregory Elliot (New York: Verso, 2002), 74, 77.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, Jan. 1751, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. L.W. Labaree and W.J. Bell (New Haven, 1961), 86-7, cited in E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past & Present* 38 (Dec. 1967): 89.

<sup>4</sup> I have in mind Marx’s comment in the *Grundrisse* stating that “It is not individuals who are set free by free competition: it is, rather, capital which is set free” (650).

“the original task of a genuine revolution, therefore, is never merely to ‘change the world,’ but also—and above all—to ‘change time.’”<sup>5</sup>

Time according to capital is a particular kind of time, one that emerged in the West but today enjoys global prominence. As is the case with time in general, however, it can be difficult to wrap the mind around, and it is no less difficult when considering the particular time of capital. Hence, it is frequently grasped indirectly because, as Agamben puts it, “Since the human mind has the experience of time but not its representation, it necessarily pictures time by means of spatial images.”<sup>6</sup> As Western capitalism developed and expanded, it brought with it its own peculiar geometrical representation of time. Coincident with the rise of capital was a metamorphosis in the conception and experience of time wherein the representation of time as rectilinear, homogenous, and infinitely accruable replaced the older sense of circular and cosmic (or sacred) time. While cultural historians such as E. P. Thompson and Jacques Le Goff or continental philosophers like Éric Alliez have provided more expansive accounts of the emergence of the rectilinear time of capital, a brief recap of this history will help to clarify how capital hegemony is concentrated in its capture of time.<sup>7</sup> In doing so, I will rely most heavily on the account provided by Alliez whose chiasmic reading of the history of philosophy allows us to see

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<sup>5</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (New York: Verso, 2007), 99. In this essay, Agamben argues that the failure of Marxism is due to its failure to develop a practice and experience of time that sufficiently compares to its concept of history.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>7</sup> See E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past and Present*, no. 38 (Dec. 1967): 56-97; Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and Éric Alliez, *Capital Times: Tales from the Conquest of Time*, *Theory Out of Bounds* 6, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).



how, through financialization, time becomes dislodged or disjointed from the time of the polis and the cosmos in order to be conformed to the process of accumulation.<sup>8</sup>

According to Alliez, the origins of the homogenous and rectilinear time of capital appear already in Aristotle's *Politics*, in his disdainful discussion of the practice of chrematistics. Given that its monetizing of time in interest tears money and time from its political and social conditions, for Aristotle chrematistics (or the art of money-making) ultimately "empties the city of its self-presence."<sup>9</sup> The practice of money-making, or money lending, as a result, cannot be fully integrated by Aristotle into the city state, and while it is a skill that inevitably develops within the life of the city it always remains at odds, or incompletely reconciled with the city. In Alliez's view because it achieves a "homogeneration" of time, "interest displays an empty form freed from this political presence and political finality that made beings coincide with self, and whose indefinite opening in the quantitative direction of chrematistics has a major effect on the Aristotelian text: the definition of chrematistic knowledge never comes to term."<sup>10</sup> A line running outside of the natural movement of the cosmos and the just movement of the polis, the art of chrematistics frees time from its subjection to the circular movement of things and, in turn, subjects movement, humanity, and the polis to a quantified time dislodged from the epistemic and ontological register of Aristotelian science. As a result,

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting here that Teresa Brennan, among others, provides an insightful and parallel analysis of how ecologically capital pulls time out of joint by transposing technological reproduction on and over the natural process of resource reproduction. In her own way she describes how the arrow of capital outruns and dislocates the circular time of nature. See Teresa Brennan, "Why Time is Out of Joint: Marx's Political Economy without the Subject," *South Atlantic* 97, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 263-280.

<sup>9</sup> Alliez, *Capital Times*, xvii.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

this practice must continually be curtailed by forcing the line back into the circle and by asserting the good of the city over the goal of the techniques of finance.<sup>11</sup>

Two times remain present in Aristotle, though the time of chrematistics is always to be subjected to the circular time of the cosmos and the polis, and yet a new sense of time emerges under the influence of Neoplatonism and Augustinian Christianity. In a world disconnected from the stability of the polis, Neoplatonism universalized time while interiorizing it, connecting it to the “audacity” of an internal will whose time is new at every given moment. As Alliez puts it, for Plotinus, “*time is the life of the soul consisting in the movement passing from one state of life to another*, that the soul is the origin of time, which is constituted along with the soul as soon as the latter arises out of intelligence...” That is to say, “time is identified with the movement of the soul (with that ‘stream of consciousness’?) that is ceaseless alterity (*aei heterotēs*).”<sup>12</sup> Whereas for Plato and Aristotle time was derivative of the eternal immutability of the cosmos, the representation in its circularity of the eternity of the whole, within Neo-Platonism the movement of the human soul is the temporal register coinciding with the eternal, cosmic soul that is the ground of its being. Setting the fine points of philosophy aside, what is critical to see here for the evolution of the concept of time is that as the image of time is dislocated from the image of the cosmos, a coinciding “transposition from cosmology (out of which comes the soul of the Platonic world) to anthropology and psychology” arises.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 1-25.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 51.

Time becomes associated with the conscious intuition of the soul's movement and the experience of it is represented internally as a series of fleeting instants. Yet, the soul, for Plotinus, is not left completely adrift and lost, as it remains a particular instance of the unfolding of the world soul that ultimately fills and enfolds all things. Therefore, for Plotinus, the internalized experience of time finds its reconciliation and fulfillment with the whole of the world through contemplation, or the intellectual instant devoid of time and self-initiated action, wherein the soul is harmonized with the whole of being in an ecstatic present.<sup>14</sup> The Neo-Platonic internalization of time with its sense of movement in a series of fleeting instants, however, would gain a new frame of reference and a new resonance in the philosophical theology of St. Augustine.

For Alliez, as for Agamben, Negri, and Arendt among others, another decisive turn in the Western concept of time occurred in the thought of Augustine.<sup>15</sup> It would be impossible to do complete justice to the complexity of Augustine's thought in the small amount of space I have here to cover it, but for the purpose of my argument one main aspect that develops from Augustine's writing on time must be mentioned. Theologically

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 65-70. Reading Husserl reading Neoplatonism, Alliez states that "Contemplation is that passive synthesis, as *syn-opsis*, synthesis of an originary time in which present, past, and future, far from reflecting themselves in representation and prevision (the derived time of action-images, *active synthesis*), are ecstatically contemporaneous with a world whose actuality is not of the passing moment but of the *self-temporalization of the absolute* within a twin horizon of pure past and future: conversion, procession, which we don't have to reunite *through* an intellectual act (intentionality of action), which is exerted in a 'vitally flowing intentionality,' 'a total framework of all souls, which are united not externally but internally, namely,' specifies Husserl, 'through the *intentional interpenetration* which is the communalization of their lives'" (65-66). Here Alliez cites Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), [§70], 255.

<sup>15</sup> See Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 103-05; Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, trans. Matteo Mandarini (New York: Continuum, 2003), 30-6; and Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Augustine's conception of time is influenced by his sense of salvation history, wherein time is not rendered circular but instead drives forward with a clear sense of movement and direction.<sup>16</sup> And yet, influenced by Neoplatonism, Augustine also sees time as an "interior phenomenon," a series of irreversible and fleeting instants newly enacted by the human will.<sup>17</sup> The human, for Augustine, *is* time. *Homo temporalis*, however, within the Augustinian understanding remains a question to herself, one whose experience of time (as a series of fleeting instants) cannot fully grasp the direction of salvation history and its connection with eternity.<sup>18</sup> While time in its original and eschatological register remains good for Augustine as it stands in natural, harmonious relation to eternity, because humanity is fallen our current experience of time is disconnected, or dislocated, from this original and salvific time and thereby takes on a disjointed, earthly quality. The distinctiveness of earthly, disjointed, and decaying time characterizes the earthly city, while the heavenly city, intuited by those trained in the wisdom of contemplation in moments such as the sacrament, remains invisible and eternal and is experienced as the complete annihilation of human time.<sup>19</sup> Augustine's conception of time is refracted through a spatial representation and this geometrical configuration of time continues to

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<sup>16</sup> St. Augustine, *City of God* 12.21. Also see Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 103.

<sup>17</sup> Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 103-104. This is also the origin of Arendt's notion of natality.

<sup>18</sup> As Arendt notes, for Augustine "This in-between position of man, between being and non-being, is now viewed essentially as a matter of time. Indeed, it is time itself." Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 73-4. As we can see here, it is in this respect that man is time.

<sup>19</sup> Alliez, *Capital Times*, 100ff. Commenting on the internal, invisible location of Christian faith that emerges in Augustine, Alliez notes earlier, "Far from there being a social norm, there remains for the Christian only an internal difference, which is revealed in the temporal dialectics of *intention* and *distention*. In the heart of the subject, in one's innermost heart [*son for interne*], is where there is the projected shadow of the ontological fracture and of transcendence, whose process of expression is merged with the history of the principle of individuality. The chain of being broken, the divinity abandons the world to creation in order to coil back into the great spaces and vast palaces of memory" (89).

inform his rendering of the relationship between the two cities. Hence, time, for Augustine, becomes synonymous with the number of the intensive movement of the human will, a movement within the fallen state of humanity that is plagued with avarice or the cupidity of turning to particular material things and away from the eternal. As a result of his dialectical construction of time, earthly time becomes disconnected from the transcendent, even as it maintains the vestige of directionality bequeathed to it by salvation history configured spatially. Earthly time, thus, takes on an independence of its own, for as Alliez puts it, “a specific break between what is beyond and what is here below, which, far from fulfilling itself in a negative logic with regard to the terrestrial city, in the end favors the autonomy of the temporal.”<sup>20</sup> The earthly, temporal realm comes to be understood as dislodged and distinct from the transcendent eternal realm, the former comprised of irreversible, individual, rectilinear, and fleeting moments and the latter the stable realm of the divine, all-encompassing present. The relation between these distinct realms would preoccupy the theological and philosophical disputes of the Middle Ages, as realists and nominalists provided their own attempts to synthesize or distinguish the quantified time of world and the purified and transcendent will.

The triumph of the homogenous and quantified time of capital, however, would only truly begin to emerge in the later Middle Ages, with the birth of cities. To quote Alliez at length,

After the Aristotelian discovery of the abstract time of chrematistics and its cosmic conjuration—the most potent ever conceived from the perspective of its gestation all through the Christian Middle Ages—after

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 83.

the flashy Neoplatonic anticipation of the ‘collapse’ of time and its transposition into a contemplative patho-logy (henopathy), after Saint Augustine’s extraordinary attempt, having armed himself with a dialectic sharpened by the dynamics of transcendence, to save time as number of the fallen soul’s intensive motion, all that could *surprise* us was the end of the World, or the extinction of a world, the apocalyptic conjunction of Earth and Heaven or their daily disjunction left abandoned to the vehicular potency of the city. This was the hope of the End or the end of Hope, the Kingdom of Christ or the Empire of Absolute Time, being subjected to a pure phenomenon of speed, *streptus urbis* (the bustle of the city).<sup>21</sup>

Prefigured in the monastery and facilitated theologically by the concept of purgatory, which served practically to link God’s time (transcendent) with earthly time in a quantitative relation, the advent of merchant time took off in the late Middle Ages, as historians Jacques Le Goff and E.P. Thompson have shown, due to the fact that merchant clocks began to replace time marked by the ringing of church bells.<sup>22</sup> Village clocks erected by merchants signaled and imposed a new experience of time, one distinct from the liturgical experience of time correlated with the holy days, masses, and seasons of the church. A more rational and secular ordering of temporality arranged according to the homogenous segments of the working day slowly became the established experience of time, as the tempo of town clocks set the rhythm of life. As Le Goff argues, “Merchants and artisans began replacing this Church time with a more accurately measured time

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>22</sup> Alliez notes the infatuation with the detailed scheduling of the day, so characteristic of merchant time and capital time, arises within the Benedictine monasteries (145) as well as the fact that the doctrine of purgatory and the selling of indulgences redeemed merchant practice by establishing a relation of exchange between this world and usurious time and the next world, or God’s time. The heavenly city could be accessed with the golden key (xxiv). Also, Jacques Le Goff notes the way in which merchant practice is rehabilitated starting in the thirteenth century and developing through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. He too notes the connection to the concept of Purgatory. See Jacques Le Goff, *Money and the Middle Ages: An Essay in Historical Anthropology*, trans. Jean Birrell (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 68-71. With respect to the role of clocks in connection to the shift in perspective on time, see Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, 29-52; and E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” 69.

useful for profane and secular tasks, clock time. The clocks which, everywhere, were erected opposite church bell towers, represent the great revolution of the communal movement in the time domain.”<sup>23</sup> Eventually, this transition in the experience of time with the emergence of working-time also monetized time, due to the fact that working hours were compensated with wage labor. Hence, this new experience of time embodied in the clock, according to E.P. Thompson, necessarily implied that “Time is now currency: it is not passed but spent.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the quantitative and segmented experience of time would only grow more intense as working hours of mercantilism began to give way to factories of the industrial revolution. A diffusion of clocks and watches accompanied the expansion of industry, as a way of synchronizing labor and exchange, and these mechanisms for regulating the experience of time set new physical and subjective rhythms.<sup>25</sup> Combined with a growing sense of progress, derived from the secularization of salvation history and realized in the advent of industrial innovation, a homogenous and rectilinear representation of time lay at the heart of maturing capitalism.<sup>26</sup>

As Marx realized, with the emergence of industrial capitalism, “time as the measure of the exchange value of labor power renders its varied expressions homogenous and comparable from the point of view of the market.”<sup>27</sup> By quantifying time “capital ‘usurps’ time,” freeing time from all other determinations so that it can appropriate all

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<sup>23</sup> Le Goff, *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, 36.

<sup>24</sup> E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” 61.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>26</sup> Agamben, “Time and History,” 105.

<sup>27</sup> William James Booth, “Economies of Time: On the Idea of Time in Marx’s Political Economy,” *Political Theory* 19, no.1 (Feb. 1991): 8.

time for itself. In this process, the central paradox of capital emerges whereby in its dedication to minimizing all constrictions on time for production it also harnesses and “binds the time of human beings.”<sup>28</sup> Conforming time to a countable and quantified element, capital is able to render the heterogeneous qualities of life (in use, practice, content, and purpose) as homogenous and exchangeable by subjecting them to a common measure. In contrast to a culture oriented by the tempo of holy days and sacred time, or the business of the polis, within capitalist culture all moments are interchangeable and must be controlled and managed. For, as Marx reminds us, “Moments are the elements of profits.”<sup>29</sup> By capturing the experience and representation of time, capital instills its structure into human beings and onto the socio-political order, orienting them to its own future of infinite accumulation and growth. With the advent of mature capitalism, the disjointed time of infinite accumulation, as a series of homogenous and irreversible units, becomes the culturally dominate experience of time. Time has become fully monetized, and *homo temporalis* has become *homo economicus*. The result, as Marx recognized, is that the person herself becomes completely determined by this experience of time. Within the domain of the fallen, earthly city, “Time is everything, man is nothing; he is at most, time’s carcass. Quality no longer matters. Quantity alone decides everything; hour for hour, day for day.”<sup>30</sup>

The brief historical sketch above was not meant to be comprehensive, but instead to provide a context for the ascendancy of the time of capital accumulation and exchange.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 14, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Marx, *Capital Volume I*, 352.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, ed. C. P. Dutt and V. Chattopadhyaya (New York: International Publishers, 1892), 47.



However, in order to fully understand the degree to which capital has captured human existence in its rendering of time, I want to look at the pivotal sense of time developed by Immanuel Kant as well as how capital's configuration of time has gained global supremacy. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* marks the most crucial turning point in the Western configuration of time because, as Alliez observes, "by discovering the order of time beneath the empty form of ordinary time, streaked by any given moment, in man's capacity to derive a function in relation to time, to master the *process of temporalization*" Kant, as "the last Scotist, the first *philosopher of cities*," brings the transcendental aspect of pure time into subjective unity with the quantitative and sequential flow of earthly time.<sup>31</sup> Attempting to cut a path between the rationalism of Leibniz and the skepticism of Hume, Kant turns his attention to the process-of-putting-together intrinsic to subjectivity which makes the knowledge of things possible, if limited. Thus, Kant embarks on an analysis of the *a priori* structures of the subject, attempting to outline the innate capacity within the very structure of the mind as an independent subject for constructing concepts that make sense out of the world intuited by the senses and presented within the imagination. The key to this process is time.<sup>32</sup> For Kant, because time is both the "formal

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<sup>31</sup> Alliez, *Capital Times*, 231. On this Kantian transition, also see Surin, *Freedom Not Yet*, 22-3.

<sup>32</sup> Twisting Augustine's sense of time, Kant sees time the mind's essential connectedness to the body. It is inner bodiliness, if you will. Man is time, as man is ensouled body. But this also means that rationality itself is at heart a construal, impregnated with a representation, of time. Even stable truths, that is to say, for Kant appear to us derived in relation to concrete lines, persisting in the passing of time. Hence, in Kant's thought, the unique status of the synthetic *a priori*, i.e., those things such as mathematical truths which bear within themselves already the imprint of time even as they are not derived from experience of the outside world but are immediately derived in relation to our experience of ourselves and the inner grammar of time. See the discussion of the transcendental aesthetic in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Pt. I, Sec. II, 178-192. Hence, time is both what so naturally connects us to the world but also what inevitably keeps us, as a rule of this grammar, at

condition of the manifold of inner sense” and “contained in every empirical representation,” one’s own sense of herself is homogenized to her experience of external objects in and through time, as the “transcendental schema” that allows for their unification.<sup>33</sup> The core and medium of the transcendental power of judgment, then, time, as the fabric of the imagination, provides the mind with the capacity to establish a rapprochement with the understanding through the process of schematization. “Hence,” as Kant states, “an application of the category to appearances becomes possible by means of the transcendental time-determination which, as the schema of the concept of the understanding, mediates the subsumption of the latter under the former.”<sup>34</sup> With respect to human subjectivity, and this subjectivity is considered to be universal for Kant, time functions as the form and the medium within which the imagination makes possible our understanding of the outside world because it is time, as both the form of the schema of

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arm’s length from its deepest truths. Newtonian physics wrestled with this issue and relativity theory has only confirmed it, even as quantum mechanics now has taken up wrestling with it anew. But at the same time, this is also why modern physics cannot so simply be reconciled to Augustine, and it is this irreconcilability that capital exploits as bodily existence becomes beholden, *en toto*, to the grammar of capital.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Pt. II. Div. I. Bk. II. Ch. I., 272. In Kant’s philosophy the transcendental realm of the heavenly city, as Carl Becker has noted, has become lodged within the very subjectivity of the individual, the ground of her existence. See Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1932). For Kant, as we can see, the inner sense of the transcendental unity of apperception is that of a line; we experience ourselves, the contiguous unity of ourselves, as a line (271n). In addition, as Louis Dupré asserts, for Kant “precisely the inner time consciousness gives structure and meaning to existence,” due to the fact that “the self’s outward orientation extenuated its sense of inner identity, reducing it virtually to a connecting link among successive and wholly contingent experiences.” See Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 159.

<sup>34</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Pt. II. Div. I. Bk. II. Ch. I., 272. Furthermore Kant goes on to state, “From this it is clear that the schematism of the understanding through the transcendental synthesis of imagination comes down to nothing other than the unity of all the manifold of intuition in inner sense, and thus indirectly to the unity of apperception, as the function that corresponds to inner sense (to a receptivity)” (276).

the imagination and the ground of the categories of understanding, that serves to homogenize the subject and the object with one another. In short, as time is the element and power by which human subjectivity orders and arranges the world in a manner that is useful for us, conceptualizing intuition, it is also through temporalizing the world that we master the objective world, filling our thoughts with content.<sup>35</sup>

Kant, therefore, by theoretically establishing the quantitative and homogenous time of capital in the very form of original time native to the transcendental unity of apperception itself solidifies the hegemony of this time within subjectivity. “From this point of view then,” Antonio Negri puts it, “the *Critique of Pure Reason* serves to found the bourgeois conception of time, both in its *superior form* [internal and external, *not* internal and/or external], and in its schematic project.”<sup>36</sup> Kant, that is to say, normalizes the unhinged time of capital, lodging it within the sense of the transcendental self (its freedom and unity of apperception) and theorizing it as the ordering mechanism of pure reason, actualized in process of schematization as the way in which humans make sense out of their world. The result is that the quantitative and rectilinear time of capital accumulation, of money and profit, of production and consumption with their linkages in circulation and distribution, are lodged within the subject, as the very element within

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<sup>35</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Pt. II. Intro., 193-94.

<sup>36</sup> Negri, *Time for Revolution*, 60. This is also the point at which Negri begins to formulate his own revolutionary theoretic of time, based upon the surplus of life that resides even within a time seemingly captured by capital. As he states, “Time, in organizing faculties of knowledge, cleaves to reality although it does not exhaust it” (60). The excess of life-time, he thinks, can be the source of a new collective and antagonistic time embodied in the negative work of the proletariat acting out of the multiplicity and fecundity of life itself. In this way, Negri (and Hardt for that matter), maintains a certain commitment to Hegel, as the collective consciousness (or should we call it spirit) latent within the excess of capital-time continues to assemble, almost from behind our backs, its own oppositions to the totalizing reach of capital.

which the world makes sense and is encountered. To quote Negri again, Kant's thought stands as a true turning point in the conception of time, solidifying capital's place by establishing its "concept of time as the form of subjectivity—a revolutionary idea of time as the project of subjectivity."<sup>37</sup> Kant provides modern, capitalist culture with a philosophical rendering of the subject's self-understanding and its understanding of the world in a form of rationality determined by and correlated to the homogenous time of capital.

One final development, however, needs to be noted with regard to the dominion of the homogenous and rectilinear time of capital, one that solidifies and even broadens and deepens the capture of our experience of time by the disjointed time of capital. This final development emerges with globalization, wherein the internal and external horizon of time becomes sealed and comprehensively determined by capital and, as a result,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 61. Kant's connection to bourgeois time and as an eighteenth century champion of emerging capitalism while somewhat implicit in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is absolutely evident in this essay on the "Idea For a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose." In this essay, Kant makes the argument that a certain purposiveness can be attributed to nature and this "highest purpose of nature" is achieved, ironically, through the "unsocial sociability" of humanity actualized in the market. Immanuel Kant, "Idea For a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," in *Kant: Political Writings*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H.B. Nisbet, 2nd ed. (1991; repr., Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 44-5. As he states, "This purpose can be fulfilled only in a society which has not only the greatest freedom, and therefore a continual antagonism among its members, but also the most precise specification and preservation of the limits of this freedom in order that it can co-exist with the freedom of others. The highest task which nature has set for mankind must therefore be that of establishing a society in which *freedom under eternal laws* would be combined to the greatest possible extent with irresistible force, in other words of establishing a perfectly *just civil constitution*" (45). For Kant, the providential workings of nature manifest in the hidden hand of the market, coordinating individual pursuits in a society to provide benefit for all, is the basis for a global Newtonian physics of human relations that brings together free individuals and unites them in a common venture for the good of society. Hence, the cosmopolitan future can only arise from the prevalence and global development of free markets, and peace will arise from constitutions based on this principle because societies that trade with one another do not make war on one another. At the heart of Kant's view, then, is a new form of rationality and one that is consistent with the workings of capital. As Daniel Bensaïd notes, "The ordered disorder of capital [so characteristic of Kant's vision of the culmination of human society] likewise required the invention of a different rationality," a rationality that parallels with respect to social relations the classical mechanics developed by Newtonian physics. Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times*, 301.

capital succeeds in encompassing all of life. As an aspect of its persistent search for profits, internally, capital continually strains toward reducing time to zero in an attempt to capture and homogenize time completely by breaking it into ever-smaller, exchangeable segments.<sup>38</sup> Within this culture the time of capital production and circulation increasingly become the time of life, as the nanoseconds of investment and exchange reach ever closer to the dream of zero with the purpose of capturing every moment for profit.<sup>39</sup> The human experience of time, furthermore, becomes disciplined by the experience of this infinitesimally quantified, sequential, and rectilinear time. At the same time, however, in connection with the global dominion of capital I discussed in the last chapter, the technological advance of this regime serves to flatten time outside the continuum with the threat of the nullification of time in violence and war. Annihilating all alternatives to the rectilinear time of capital, the globalization of the market implies that the only way to survive, to live, is to become synchronized to capital time. Marking the exterior of the experience of time within capital and bolstering its linear representation is the threat of the nuclear bomb, the real, if excessive, threat posed to any

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<sup>38</sup> In his analysis of the process of capital, Marx elicits the implicit dream of capital to reduce circulation time to zero. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 538-9. Notice also that the connection between production time and circulation time gives rise to the mechanism of credit, as an attempt to valorize the non-value generating barrier of circulation time (658-60). Through credit and the complete monetization of time, capital aims to overcome this barrier through the creation of what Negri calls “productive circulation” (*Time for Revolution*, 65), and is conveyed by Marx in the ultimate equation of capital:  $M \rightarrow M'$ .

<sup>39</sup> Negri, *Time for Revolution*, 44. As David Harvey, remarks, “For instance we all too easily forget that the hour was largely an invention of the thirteenth century, that the minute and the second became common measures only as late as the seventeenth century and it is only in recent times that terms like ‘nanoseconds’ have been invented.” Harvey, *Companion to Capital*, 147. One can see here the strong correlation between the increasingly microscopic division of time and the lengthening reach of governmentality in late capital. One example of the infinitesimal capture of time by capital can be seen in the Flash Crash of May 6, 2010, wherein the Dow Jones Industrial Average lost nearly 1000 points in a matter of minutes only to make that loss up a few minutes later. The drastic volatility of this event was apparently facilitated by computer generated high-frequency trading.

alternative to the realization of a global market.<sup>40</sup> Outside capital time, is the bomb: the nihilation of time. The hegemony of capital, the power of the economic institutions and financial corporations at the heart of it, as I noted in the last chapter, cannot be separated from the technologies and threat of war that paved the way for the ascendancy of capital and now bolster its global operations.<sup>41</sup> As the emblem of the nullification or annihilation

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<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of this view of time under capital, see Negri, *Time for Revolution*, 64-70. Sheldon Wolin makes a similar argument, noting the way in which even revolution is incorporated into the synchronized march of global capital and technological advance. He states, "Specifically, the tempos of revolution have been appropriated by corporate capital but not simply by capital as an economic form of organization. The full import of Joseph Schumpeter's formula of capitalism as 'creative destruction' is best appreciated by taking into account not only the dynamics of the market and of the globalizing reach of capital, but of the 'troika effect' issuing from the union of capital, technology, and science. That combination of powers has made possible a unique revolutionary tempo. By enlisting technological innovation and scientific discovery and joining them with its own impulses, capital has produced an unprecedented form of power. The combination has quickened the rate of change throughout the world, hurrying premodern societies into postmodernity, shaking up social structures, undermining traditional authorities. It is heralded as revolution without violence, or rather, violence is presented as modernization, as 'new times' when innovation quickly scrubs out memory." Sheldon Wolin, "Agitated Times," *Parallax* 11 no. 4 (2005): 8. And he adds "thus, the new model agitator serves as pacifier, exploiting change so that its rapid tempo prevents critical thought from gaining purchase—hence no need to muzzle critics—and structural injustices go unremedied. Like revolution, agitation has been incorporated, its tempo coopted" (9).

<sup>41</sup> The relation between the technological dominance of the U.S. industrial-military complex and the global success of capitalism is well documented. As I will discuss more thoroughly in the next chapter, not only is this the basis of Francis Fukuyama's widely popular thesis in *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006), but a similar argument is developed by Philip Bobbitt in *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Knopf, 2002), and can be inferred to stand behind the destructive and asymmetrical relations of the IMF, World Bank, and WTO chronicled by Joseph Stiglitz in *Globalization and Its Discontents*. The gestures of resistance enacted by radical states such as North Korean and Iran have necessarily engaged on this horizon, as they seek to claim independence from Western hegemony through the development of a counter-bomb and in doing so, not only create a more hostile and possibly catastrophically violent clash, but they also fail to learn the lessons of history, understanding that the productive capacity for arms outside the orb of capital is dwarfed significantly by the capacity of capital to produce the technologies essential for creating a dominant war machine. While resistance may be possible on some level, as we have seen in Afghanistan, Iraq, North Korea, Iran, or even with Al Qaeda, this resistance cannot really challenge the productive capacity, the economic dominance, or the global military might of the state-capital regime. As Hardt and Negri have pointed out, key to the global imperialism of capitalist sovereignty are: "the bomb, money, and ether." With respect to the bomb, they continue, "This is an operation of absolute violence, a new metaphysical horizon, which completely changes the conception whereby the sovereign state had a monopoly of legitimate physical force." Hence, "From no other standpoint is the passage from modernity to postmodernity and from modern sovereignty to Empire more evident than it is from the standpoint of the bomb." Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 345. In my analysis of global capital in the last chapter I discussed the imperial role of money and I have noted all

of time outside of capital, the bomb stands as the external and underlying force of globalization, overdetermining existence by establishing a clear and firm horizon for consciousness of the rectilinear and homogenous time of capital across the whole of human life. Within this (global) horizon, then, existence itself is subsumed by the time of capital. As Negri notes, “Time constitutes the immediate ground of reference, an average social time that has invested all the sections of society—production, reproduction and circulation [and consumption]—and within which all the articulations of being are given.”<sup>42</sup> The time of capital envelopes all of life, subsuming human existence both objectively and subjectively in the formation of an ontology of its own.

The flat and homogenous time of capital, thus, achieves a kind of totality. Within what Negri refers to as the “Umwelt”, or the complete subsumption of the reasoning subject and culture within the envelope of capital time, “Time becomes substantial, given in the form of real constitution—as totality.”<sup>43</sup> The Kantian temporal subject becomes solidified and reified as the final form of subjectivity concretized in the hegemony of an experience and representation of time determined by capital. Through time, that is to say, “the schematism of reason appears to offer the possibility of traversing this dense

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along the importance of media, advertisements, and technologies of communication as residing at the heart of capital’s governmentality.

<sup>42</sup> Negri, *Time for Revolution*, 36.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 40. For Negri, then, capital subsumes all of life within its time and, as a result, comes to define the substance of life. As he states, “in relation to labour, time is at once *measure* and *matter*, *form* and *substance*” (24). A similar point with respect to its connection to money is made by Randy Martin, who observes that “the financialization of daily life is a proposal for how to get ahead, but also a medium for the expansive movements of body and soul” and as a result, money-time becomes the medium through which to enact “the acquisition of self.” Martin, *Financialization of Daily Life*, 3.

universe flattened on time and to control it.”<sup>44</sup> By controlling time, rendering all time homogenous and exchangeable, capital is able to construct reality relative to this time and to generate a global culture and to determine the substance and order of life. Homogenizing time, through the implosion of all heterogeneous times in the fluid process of production and consumption, capital is able not only to eradicate the barriers to its dominion but it is also able to establish its dominion at the very heart of the consumer/enterprise subject, or “prosumer,” named in the last chapter.<sup>45</sup> Capital triumphs over the space-time continuum of reality and the process of capital becomes the very process of life itself, synchronizing the human world, and what humans know and

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<sup>44</sup> Negri, *Time for Revolution*, 39.

<sup>45</sup> On the notion of “implosion,” see George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Continuity and Change in the Cathedrals of Consumption*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2010), 118. Building on the work of Jean Baudrillard, Ritzer describes “implosion” as “the disintegration or disappearance of boundaries as formerly differentiated entities collapse into each other,” noting that it is the nature of implosion to create a “chain reaction” that leads to the erosion of other boundaries. With regard to time and space, which are the elements of implosion, Ritzer observes, “In order to compress time and space, the barriers between various dimensions of time and space must be eroded. Indeed, another way of saying that time and space have been compressed is to say the differences within each have imploded.” Furthermore, he comments, “It is worth noting that space is not nearly as amenable to implosion as time. Time creates no barriers to those who seek to use it differently” (140). Thus, with his focus primarily on consumption, Ritzer describes the various ways in which implosion is deployed as a means of manipulating consumers, providing them the experience of homogenized time that can even evince itself as the complete loss of time so that the entirety of time can be devoted to consumption (141). Of course, the notion of implosion arises from the drive of capital toward totality. As Marx notes, in its drive to create a world market, capital seeks to overcome all external barriers while at the same time “it strives... to annihilate this space with time, i.e., to reduce to a minimum the time spent in motion from one place to another.” Marx, *Grundrisse*, 539. The implosion of time itself is simply the next step in harnessing human existence in the formation of a global, total market. Similarly, David Harvey’s work on the “space-time compression” of capital notes from a geographical perspective how capital reshapes human relations. See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1990). Finally, this temporalization of space is noted by Negri as well. He notes, “In Marx, in the theory of capitalist development up to real subsumption, the *traditional relationship of time to space is definitively overturned*. Space is temporalized, it becomes dynamic: it is a condition of the constitutive realization of time. With Marx, time becomes the exclusive material of the construction of life.” Negri, *Time for Revolution*, 35. Thus we can see that the complete orb of human existence, where consumption and production dovetail in complete unison, becomes enveloped within the homogenous time of capital. For Ritzer’s discussion of the confluence of this producing and consuming subject in the “prosumer” see *Enchanting a Disenchanted World*, 36f.



understand of the world, to exchange and accumulation. The time of capital becomes homologous to the human herself as she exists in the world.<sup>46</sup> The very substance of life is associated with, experienced as, and represented in the process of capital accumulation, consumption, production, and exchange as the homogenized time of capital establishes and reifies a global culture.

The out of joint time of capital has captured time, ordering not only natural resources, labor, technology, infrastructure and space, political decisions, and social interactions according to the rectilinear and homogenous drive of accumulation and exchange, but by transfiguring the experience of time it has also consolidated its order within human subjectivity and rationality. Hence, capital does not simply organize a market that can be freely entered and freely egressed, but constitutes a subjectivity and a corresponding ontology in which it presents the market as constitutive of the height of human existence and its most developed way of being-in-the-world.<sup>47</sup> Homogenizing

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<sup>46</sup> Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 107. In similar fashion, Derrida states in *Spectres of Marx* that “This *socius*, then, binds ‘men’ who are first of all experiences of time, existences determined by this relation to time which itself would not be possible without surviving and returning, within that being ‘out of joint’ that dislocates the self-presence of the living present and installs thereby the relation to the other.” Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 193.

<sup>47</sup> The modern project can be understood as the quest for freedom from the tyranny of nature. As the central figure of modernity, Kant had tried to provide an answer to the antinomy of freedom and natural necessity by placing this opposition within consciousness and not in the world itself. Kant’s third antinomy is that between natural necessity, or causality, and freedom. While not resolving it, Kant sought to display that this antinomy was an antinomy of consciousness itself not one within the world necessarily. In doing so he described two distinct realms the phenomenal and the noumenal, noting that while the phenomenal world could not escape the dictates of causality, freedom could be thought to reside in the noumenal sphere of the pure subject. Thus, human freedom could remain as an idea of reason that pertained to the noumenal realm of the subject, while the regulations of natural necessity were in fact the exercise of reason in its engagement with the external world so as to organize it for knowledge. Yet this answer was highly unsatisfactory to Hegel who found this antinomy to be the defining contradiction of modern life. Thus, Hegel’s entire philosophy emerged from his persistent attempt to find a way to reconcile this antinomy. To do so, Hegel turns to the notion of the “becoming of consciousness”, or the movement of spirit within history as the unfolding of the true. Consciousness for Hegel is the relationship of subject to

time provides capital with the type of social rhythm and subjective tempo that creates a global culture of the market, enlisting human experience into its representation of the world.<sup>48</sup> Quantified time, equated to and homogenized as money, thus, becomes not only the representation of capital accumulation, the arrow dislodged from the ancient notion of the self-presence of human existence in the world, but even more it becomes the new form of the future of the self for human existence across the globe. As life becomes subsumed within capital time, wherein time is quantified as money, it is accompanied by a contraction and compression of judgment as profitable exchange and capital accumulation determine resolutions. Thus, through the element of time the process of capital sets the pace, tempo, and command of collective life and political judgment because it establishes the formal structure of human existence that orients us in the world. The reign of capital is the reign of a dislocated time, a time pulled out of joint, the rhythm of which has become normalized within the subjectivity, structuring practices, and objective order of capital culture. Mimicking the thrust of the fullness of time associated

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nature, wherein the subject appears to and for itself in relation to this other. The complete reality of this relationship, however, does not appear immediately but unfolds through time in history. Because we are communal animals, consciousness only becomes actual as it realizes itself in the objective manifestation of the state. Hegel's objective in the *Philosophy of Right* is to display the full integration of the freedom of the individual into the concrete reality of the state because consciousness is not simply an individual thing but the collective conscious of a people. For only, in the state can we be in, to, and for ourselves. To this extent the history of consciousness is the history of the state. The actualization of freedom has this objective component, wherein we receive what is outside us as ourselves, achieving the full reconciliation of nature and freedom.

<sup>48</sup> Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times*, 250. Similarly Cesare Casarino, in "Time Matters: Marx, Negri, Agamben, and the Corporeal," *Strategies* 16, No. 2 (2003): 185-206, recognizes that when time equals money, a certain homogenization of time must be in place such that each moment is quantifiably exchangeable with every other moment and each instant can be infinitely compiled in the accrual of money (197-98).

with salvation history, therefore, capital provides the illusion that it heals time by configuring it according to the notion of infinite growth, accumulation, and development. What it really does, however, is to further dislocate time and to twist it into a form of chronic time that traps and directs humanity toward ever-growing divisions, accumulation by dispossession, and innovative modes of exploitation. Thus, as I noted at the start of this section following Agamben, an alternative to the disjointed and misdirected time of exchange and accumulation must emerge from a qualitative transformation of time, one that contests the spatialized and quantified sense of time under capital with a dynamic sense of time determined by a distinct and peculiar content.<sup>49</sup>

It is the practice of reclaiming time from capital through the enactment of a new temporal and political process based in the apocalyptic transformation of things in Christ that I want to describe in the remainder of this chapter. Relying upon the time given by God in the sacred process of binding and loosing to listen to wrongs and to discern alternative resolutions and acting out of this apocalyptic disposition, I argue, NC United Power disrupted and challenged the dominate time of capital. To show this, I first relate how the enactment of a new, alternative time was present in the organizing activity of NC

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<sup>49</sup> Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 99. As I will show below, and as should already be obvious given my theological argument in chapter one, while we can follow Agamben and Marx in privileging the “*praxis*” of time as the essence of humanity, we need not follow him in seeing a blend of Gnosticism and Stoicism as the resources for developing such a theoretical pragmatics (110-11). The heart of my argument is, in fact, that the church and its theological pragmatics based in the incarnation and worked out in the practice of binding and loosing provides another, and perhaps more promising, alternative. And yet, we can also see an affinity between the historical time of humanity corresponding to the site of pleasure sought by Agamben (114-15), and the theological time of Christ whose history fulfills human history and makes human history possible in a mode of doxology, mission, and joy. For a full discussion of this as the theme of Barth’s theology, see Timothy J. Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 271-81.

United Power's campaign against foreclosures. I then connect the enactment of new time in this campaign with, what I see, as its underlying theological and ecclesial basis in the alternative and reconciling temporal process of binding and loosing. Corresponding to the apocalyptic political subjectivity of the church, this new mode of political judgment aimed toward the love and justice of God, I conclude, was extended and extrapolated through the work of community organizing, reclaiming time from within capital to deliberate, discern, and discover alternative resolutions.

### *Redeeming Time for Justice*

I now want to return to the work of NC United Power. In doing so, I want to show how the homogenization of time by capital described in the theoretical analysis I just provided was exhibited in the process of foreclosures. Operating according to capital time, lenders, servicers, and financial institutions sought to dictate the pace and outcome of the foreclosure proceedings, providing their own resolutions to the housing crisis that decidedly privileged their own interest. Additionally, by looking back at NC United Power's campaign on this issue, I will describe how the organization challenged these procedures by taking the time to engage the crisis in a different manner, a manner grounded in the ecclesial process of binding and loosing. In doing so, they relied upon an alternative experience of time enacted in this sacred process to contest the tempo and rhythm of capital and to proceed toward more just resolutions. After tracing the narrative of this campaign and highlighting the alternative approach to foreclosure exhibited by NC

United Power, in the final section of the chapter I will provide a theological interpretation of these events that connects this activity to the apocalyptic orientation of the church.

True to form and the experience of time under capital, the banks proceeded to address the housing crisis by attempting to return themselves to profitability as quickly as possible. The path, they determined, was through foreclosure. As I recounted in chapter three, after the housing bubble burst between the fall of 2007 and the spring of 2008 banks saw their balance sheets littered with bad loans as millions of homeowners fell delinquent on their payments and began to slip toward default. Between July and September of 2009, the wave would crest with 937,840 properties either tumbling into default, bank repossession, or being offered at auction in the third quarter of the year. During this brief period, foreclosure filings were initiated on one out of every 136 homeowners. In August alone, the height of the nationwide epidemic, lenders repossessed 93,364 homes and, as I noted in chapter three, filed foreclosures against 338,836 households. Though by no means the worst of the states afflicted with foreclosure, North Carolina experienced 9,818 foreclosure filings during this third quarter swell.<sup>50</sup> Among the hardest hit by the housing market collapse were low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, as homeowners in these areas by 2011 were twice as likely to be underwater in their mortgage than borrowers in more affluent communities. By the first quarter of this same year, thirteen percent of mortgages originating in these low- and moderate-income communities were ninety days or more delinquent. One of the main

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<sup>50</sup> This data was reported by RealtyTrac Inc., a company based in Irvine, CA that reports national foreclosures and acts as a clearinghouse for these properties. The data is available at: <http://www.realtytrac.com/foreclosure/foreclosure-rates.html>, accessed on April 11, 2013.

contributing factors to the high rate of delinquency was that borrowers in these neighborhoods had been convinced to accept complicated and high-risk mortgage products with adjustable rates or teaser rates on full loan-to-value subprime mortgages.<sup>51</sup> Already precariously positioned with little equity and payments that stretched their monthly budget, when rates began to move up and housing prices began to drop, and the lagging economy prompted job-loss or fewer hours, many of these homeowners could no longer afford the payments. As a result, many faced the prospect of losing their homes.<sup>52</sup>

Throughout the series of individual meetings and house meetings conducted by NC United Power shortly after the collapse of the economy, the issue of foreclosure repeatedly came to the fore as something with which people were struggling. One Raleigh, NC woman and single mother of four, Marcella Robinson, found herself facing a mortgage she could not pay after losing her job. She was one of the millions of low- and moderate-income buyers ensnared by the duplicitous practices of a lender who sold her on a subprime, adjustable rate loan.<sup>53</sup> Along with eighty percent of the other homebuyers

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<sup>51</sup> The impact on low- and moderate-income neighborhoods was the topic of a public address given by Janet L. Yellen, Vice Chair of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, at the 2011 Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland Policy Summit in Cleveland, OH on June 9, 2011. See Yellen, "Housing Market Developments and Their Effects on Low- and Moderate-Income Neighborhoods" (Cleveland, OH, June 9, 2011), 7. Citing research provided in Christopher Mayer, Karen Pence, and Shane Sherlund, "The Rise in Mortgage Defaults," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 23 no. 1 (2008): 27-50, available at: [www.federalreserve.gov/pubs/feds/2008/200859/20059abs.html](http://www.federalreserve.gov/pubs/feds/2008/200859/20059abs.html), Yellen notes that "the median combined loan-to-value ratio on securitized subprime purchase mortgages originated in 2005 through 2007 was 100 percent." Yellen also notes that the impact on these individuals was compounded by the fact that a house tends to be a much larger share of their overall assets and the single largest personal investment.

<sup>52</sup> In addition, and illustrating the confluence of financial hurdles faced by low- and middle-class families, one study reported that nearly half of the respondents polled who were facing foreclosure stated that their foreclosure was the result of a medical expenses, see Christopher T. Robertson, Richard Egelhof, and Michael Hoke, "Get Sick, Get Out: the Medical Causes of Home Mortgage Foreclosures," *Health Matrix: Journal of Law-Medicine* 18, no. 65 (2008): 65-105.

<sup>53</sup> Robinson talks about her experience getting a loan in a video produced by North Carolina United Power/ IAF in association with the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, written and

in her neighborhood, Robinson was persuaded to take out an interest-only, adjustable rate mortgage, convinced to do so through one of the builder and bank financing arrangements that were widely popular at the time. Working in coordination with the builder KB Home, her Countrywide loan officer talked her into this loan by telling her that once she built up more credit history he would refinance her loan before it drastically re-adjusted in two years. The initial mortgage, Robinson recounted her loan officer telling her, “was just something to get [her] in the door...” as a way for her “to acquire the house.” As the housing market imploded and the economy contracted, however, she lost her job and was unable to refinance her mortgage. As a result, she and her children were facing immanent eviction and foreclosure. A similar story was told by Rosetta Johnson, who said originally “I was ecstatic that I was even going to be a homeowner...[but] I was not educated and I did not know that I actually, really needed to have someone to represent [me]” in this process. As Rochelle Sparko, an attorney with the NC Justice Center who has worked with a number of people to try to renegotiate their loans, put it, “a lot of people did not know that they had an adjustable rate loan...” Additionally, she stated, most of the people who did know they had an adjustable rate loan “were kind of soothed into signing the paperwork.”

While the banks had clearly played a role in creating the housing bubble and in persuading people to take out extremely risky, if not knowingly bad, loans, they were not

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edited by Mark Giguere, *Subprime Mortgages: the Victims of Predatory Lending* (Durham, NC: North Carolina United Power and Metro IAF, 2012), videorecording, available online at: <http://www.ncunitedpower.org/issue-campaigns/get-informed/facing-foreclosure/>. This video also includes the statements made by Rosetta Johnson and Rochelle Sparko below.

interested in trying to work with these homeowners to find a solution that would help them keep their homes. Those facing foreclosure simply discovered their lenders, servicers, and banks to be unconcerned with their predicament and unwilling to listen to their stories. “We don’t feel like the banks are doing enough to work with those who are facing foreclosures, to work with them to help them with modifications,” said Charlotte, NC resident Lamonya Kirkland.<sup>54</sup> Kirkland, who had been in her home for nine years, was facing foreclosure due to the fact that she could not make her payments because the economic downturn had left her unemployed for more than a year. Similarly, Jenny Barker, a homeowner from Highpoint, NC, expressed her frustration with trying to get a modification, stating, “I think we’ve sent paperwork up [to the bank] no less than six times.”<sup>55</sup> When questioned about her own experience in trying to get the bank to work with her, Robinson stated that she had tried many times to contact her lender to check on the status of her loan, only to be passed on to another department that never answered, to be hung up on, or to be disconnected.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, after applying for a loan modification, her lender (under the pretext of helping her) approved her application only to stick her back in the same exact mortgage arrangement she was struggling to pay. Carolyn Jones,

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<sup>54</sup> Richard Devayne, “Homeowners in fear of foreclosure meet with top man at BOA,” WCNC News Channel 36, April 12, 2011, available at: [www.wcnc.com/news/local/Homeowners-in-fear-of-foreclosure-meet-with-top-man-at-BOA-119724084.html](http://www.wcnc.com/news/local/Homeowners-in-fear-of-foreclosure-meet-with-top-man-at-BOA-119724084.html)

<sup>55</sup> Jenny Barker’s comments are contained in a video produced by North Carolina United Power/IAF in association with the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, executive producer Bruce Orenstein, *Defending Our Homes and Communities* (Durham, NC: North Carolina United Power and Metro IAF, 2012), videorecording, available at: <http://www.ncunitedpower.org/>

<sup>56</sup> Robinson recounts this aspect of her experience in a second video produced and written by Kinnari Bhojani in collaboration with North Carolina United Power/IAF, *The Struggle to Stay: A Window in the Loan Modification Program* (Durham, NC: North Carolina United Power and Metro IAF, 2012) videorecording, available at: <http://www.ncunitedpower.org/issue-campaigns/get-informed/facing-foreclosure/>.



another Charlotte, NC resident, voiced these same issues, commenting that Wells Fargo initially had offered to grant her forbearance by suspending her \$1,440 monthly payments while assuring her that the suspended payments would be added to the end of her loan. However, the bank soon began to send her letters demanding immediate repayment of the lapsed amount, refusing to negotiate her loan or to consider the paperwork she submitted. Jones' experience with the bank, like Robinson's, resulted simply in making her situation worse. Noting the injustice of offering someone a resolution that actually leaves them worse off and expressing the general sense of frustration and disgust that emerged from these individual and house meetings, Jones said, "It's not right."<sup>57</sup>

Particularly alarming for those who were caught up in this wave of foreclosures was the velocity at which they were moving and the slanted outcome of their resolutions. As banks sought to limit and control the damage being done to their profits after the housing collapse and the decline of the market, they looked to remedy the bad notes on their balance sheets by seeking to eliminate the mass of troubled assets at a rapid pace. In so doing, they employed antics that made no attempt to unravel the complex knot of years of multiple sales and re-sales and of bundling, slicing, and repackaging mortgages as new securities that had generated the mess. Instead, they set about resolving these problems by quickly cutting their losses, pushing forward with foreclosures at a brisk clip even without the proper paperwork to do so. The rush to resolve these troubled assets spurred by the necessity to return as quickly as possible to profitability and growth in capital

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<sup>57</sup> Stella M. Hopkins, "She got help, then foreclosure," *Charlotte Observer*, June 6, 2010, available at: <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2010/06/05/1479580/she-got-help-then-foreclosure.html>

time, led to a process rampant with fraud, secrecy, lack of communication, and one-sided solutions. While bank officials voiced the need for average homeowners to reconsider their view of homeownership, leading Bank of America CEO Bryan Moynihan to admonish them to “love it as a home, but not necessarily as a financial investment,” it was clear that from the point of view of these financial institutions their main concern was quite simply their bottom line.<sup>58</sup>

Under the auspices of market re-correction, or even creative destruction,<sup>59</sup> what was really happening throughout this crisis was a rapid episode of accumulation by dispossession, as financial institutions rushed to repossess and auction these distressed assets as quickly as possible without any input from or meeting with distressed homeowners. Leaving evicted homeowners humiliated and destitute, banks raced to reassess these investments, often recognizing that because they were primarily functioning as simply the servicer of these loans, having sold the mortgages on the securities market to unwitting investors, they were actually poised to make more money in foreclosure fees than in attempting to save the homeowner and the mortgage. With the powers of finance attempting to limit losses and maximize returns, the entire process of foreclosure was being left to the rhythm of economic investment and sudden market

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<sup>58</sup> Adam O’Daniel, “Bank of America CEO: principal reduction not a foreclosure cure-all,” *Dayton Business Journal*, April 12, 2011, available at: <http://www.bizjournals.com/dayton/news/2011/04/12/bank-of-america-ceo-principal.html>

<sup>59</sup> Though there is some disagreement regarding Joseph Schumpeter’s own view of capitalism, he develops this term in order to describe, what he calls, “the essential fact about capitalism.” While the roots of the term are in Marx, following Schumpeter’s use it has come to be seen primarily in a positive light by proponents of the free market. Meant to refer to the innovative episodes in which devastation opens the field for a new phase of creativity, Schumpeter uses the term to describe the fundamental motor of capitalism “that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one.” Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 83.

adjustments, giving no attention to the impact on individuals, families, and communities. After all, by the fall of 2012 these foreclosed properties would once again become the objects of speculation as large corporations and investment firms backed by finance capital would be swooping in to buy them up at depreciated prices.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, the celerity and asymmetry of this process was marked even more by a lack of transparency and often dishonest, or deceitful, actions by the banks. Nothing better illustrates the secrecy and duplicitous actions of lenders and servicers than the fact that when they realized they lacked the proper paperwork necessary legally to proceed with these foreclosures they began to engage in the practice of “robo-signing”. As I explained in chapter three and as organizers would eventually discover (and which would soon become the focus of their work on this issue), robo-signing was the fraudulent practice banks employed of mass-producing the documents needed to pursue foreclosures. To do so, they hired people to forge the signatures of fictional bank executives in secret document mills across the nation, mass producing the phony paperwork that would allow them to continue and even accelerate the foreclosure process. As one pundit put it, with employees signing thousands of documents a week, it is clear that “speed and cost, rather than accuracy, [was] the primary concern...”<sup>61</sup> As an indication of how widespread this activity was, a subsequent audit of Guilford County, NC conducted by the Register of Deeds Jeff Thigpen uncovered 4,500 files with falsified

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<sup>60</sup> Meghan Hoyer, “Investment firms eye single-family rentals,” *USA Today*, October 22, 2012.

<sup>61</sup> Ilan Moscovitz, “Rising Star Shorts: Bank of America and Lender Processing,” *The Motley Fool*, December 21, 2010, available at: <http://www.fool.com/investing/general/2010/12/21/rising-star-shorts-bank-of-america-and-lender-proc.aspx>

documents<sup>62</sup> and reports would conclude that as many as 1.2 million borrowers (nearly 30 percent) across the nation suffered wrongful foreclosure in one of the largest periods of accumulation by dispossession in the nation's history.<sup>63</sup> While the findings of the Guilford County audit would be a focus of NC United Power's campaign later on, the actions of the bank had not yet come to light, and many homeowners continued to find themselves with no way to keep the banks from going forward. At the same time, because banks were engaging in dual-tracking, even homeowners who thought that their bank was working with them to renegotiate their loan were discovering that another branch of the bank was actively pursuing foreclosure proceedings against them. Thwarted by secrecy and duplicity of this distorted process, those facing foreclosure remained confused and frustrated with seemingly little recourse as these events unfolded. With no leverage, no contact, and no information, distressed homeowners found themselves captive to a process that privileged the interests of financial institutions and moved them speedily toward unfair resolutions without any means of slowing the process down or working out a mutual resolution.

The ability of the big banks to get away with such activity and to proceed relatively unchallenged in their mass pursuit of speedy foreclosures was the fact that the individuals facing foreclosure were locked within a corresponding subjectivity, leading them to see these events as their fault and the actions of the banks as merely the

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<sup>62</sup> Thigpen's office offered a press release on June 7, 2011, making public the findings of their internal audit. I will return to the issue of "robo-signing" in the next chapter as I describe the ongoing work of NC United Power to provide an alternative way forward.

<sup>63</sup> Shahien Nasiripour, "Foreclosure Review Finds Potentially Widespread Errors," *Huffington Post*, April 9, 2013, available at: [www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/09/foreclosure-review-errors\\_n\\_3045941.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/09/foreclosure-review-errors_n_3045941.html)

necessary procedures of economic laws. Having been caught up in what David Harvey has described as a culture of “intense possessive individualism and financial opportunism”<sup>64</sup> homebuyers such as Rosetta Johnson were initially enticed into purchasing their homes as a way of fulfilling their desire to become normal Americans. As she put it, “I just knew that I wanted my American dream... to own my own home.” Marcella Robinson echoed these sentiments, expressing how buying her “dream home” had provided her with a sense of pride and belonging, a critical step to getting ahead in the world and to becoming independent and secure.<sup>65</sup> It was a mentality widely shared and broadly promoted even by the banks and loan officers themselves, as Chris Kukla with the Center for Responsible Lending reported. Noting that lenders were knowingly selling bad loans, Kukla relayed that they were doing so by telling people such as Johnson and Robinson, “It’s what everybody does. Housing prices are booming... you don’t want to miss this wave.”<sup>66</sup> When they began to struggle with payments due to job-loss and rising interest rates and fell delinquent on their mortgages, however, homeowners such as Johnson and Robinson discovered the underside of this mentality, as they became overwhelmed with shame, embarrassment, and a sense of personal failure. When asked how she first reacted to the prospect of foreclosure, Robinson stated, “It was a total embarrassment to me and to my kids. I felt like a failure.”<sup>67</sup> The despair and isolation of those in this position came across in Lamonya Kirkland’s comment at sensing that her story was being ignored by her bank as her life was falling apart. She said, “You

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<sup>64</sup> Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*, 175.

<sup>65</sup> Orenstein, *Defending our Homes and Communities*, videorecording.

<sup>66</sup> Giguere, *Subprime Mortgages*, videorecording.

<sup>67</sup> Bhojani, *Struggle to Stay*, videorecording.

get emotional. You get frustrated, because it's hard—because you worked so hard to get this far.”<sup>68</sup> Overcome with loneliness, guilt, and despair, and convinced that the process of foreclosure was simply an inevitable and unavoidable consequence, distressed homeowners like Kirkland felt hopeless and helpless as the banks, without oversight, were pursuing foreclosures at their own pace and according to their own sense of fairness. Moreover, as Rochelle Sparko noted and as was echoed by Archie Smith, Durham County, NC Clerk of Courts, individuals and families embroiled in foreclosure are often so embarrassed and ashamed, so overwhelmed with a sense of blame and disappointment, believing there was nothing they can do anyway, that they did not even attend their own foreclosure hearings. As a result, the banks were allowed to proceed unencumbered and unchallenged to pursue their own best interest. Facing the reality of foreclosure, most homeowners had resigned themselves to ruin and despair.

Within the work of NC United Power, however, a different approach to this issue was taken. By taking the time to listen and to meet with distressed homeowners, by bringing people together to confront and challenge the banks, and by patiently pursuing mutual agreements, NC United Power brought a new mode of political judgment to the issue of foreclosure proceedings. Enacting a different process, they sought to help distressed homeowners and to empower them as well as to offer the banks more just, though pragmatic, ways of moving forward in this time of crisis. Through the listening sessions and individual face-to-face meetings conducted throughout the seven local organizations that compose NC United Power after the 2007-2008 economic collapse,

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<sup>68</sup> Devayne, “Homeowners in fear of foreclosure meet with top man at BOA.”

individuals began to emerge from the isolation and shame to tell their stories and to begin to come together in the hope of finding alternative resolutions.

Attempting to address the issues being raised around foreclosure, NC United Power began to bring these individuals together and through organizing them to set about to reconfigure the entire foreclosure process. Reflecting the elements of conflict resolution learned within the church through the practice of binding and loosing and working from their commitment to justice, forgiveness, and mercy embodied in the Jubilee of the Lord's table, they set out to take time in the process for face-to-face meetings between distressed homeowners and lenders, to hold banks accountable for their actions (prior and current), and to work for more equitable resolutions that put persons, families, and communities above profits. Building on the momentum gained from the action against usury in Charlotte, NC during the fall of 2009, NC United Power leaders and clergy met with Wells Fargo/Wachovia executives to discuss issues being raised by homeowners. Additionally, following up on the promise of Bank of America Chairman Walter Massey, they met with the bank's Global Corporate Social Responsibility Executive Andrew Plepler on February 12, 2010. Of the main issues discussed in these meetings, along with a proposal to limit interest rates on veterans, was a plan to restructure troubled mortgages in order to avoid repossession and eviction.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, the leaders and clergy of NC United Power began a series of meetings with North Carolina's Attorney General, Roy Cooper, to pressure him to look into bank practices and to offer some protection for those facing foreclosure by slowing the process and

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<sup>69</sup> DeConto, "Interest rate sought for plastic."

demanding more stringent oversight of proceedings and documentation. Within the relational culture of NC United Power's organizing, that is to say, with the support of the many church congregations that hosted these listening sessions and created action teams to work on the issues of predatory lending and foreclosure, they were able to take the time to speak honestly about their circumstances and to open up the hope of a new way forward. As Gerald Taylor put it, "People began to sense a possibility that they could change it, to not feel powerless...[that] it's not their fault; they don't have to be alone; they don't have to be ashamed about something that's happened to them whether they've lost their job or are about to lose their home... or that they are caught in something that they can't get out of."<sup>70</sup> To begin changing the process of resolving the issues of the housing market, organizers and church leaders would have to start by taking the time to listen and bring people together, offering them a way to pursue new resolutions.

Furthermore, NC United Power's organizing efforts on this issue were not a one-act performance, but instead coordinated to work throughout the long haul of a process that would include the skills of conflict resolution, patient persistence, and discernment. In short, the campaign would enact a mode of prolonged political judgment that took the time to listen to struggling homeowners, to acknowledge their issues, and to confront the banks and hold them accountable while looking for new, mutually agreeable, options. Thus, it involved conflict, patience, and the power to bind and loose. As I have already discussed in chapter three, the campaign on usury, predatory lending, and foreclosure was controversial from the beginning, even within the congregations that participated. Hence,

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<sup>70</sup> Bhojani, *Struggle to Stay*, videorecording.



it was during this time that the series of meetings at St. Martin's in Charlotte, NC occurred. These discussions and conversations between ex-bankers, regulators, lawyers, business leaders, and ministers, as I have recounted, led to a proposal for an alternative and theologically pragmatic option that worked within the structures to open up new possibilities. As Gerald Taylor, participant in and leader of these conversations recalled, the document written by the group and suggesting the possibility of a shared-appreciation mortgage "became the document that formed the basis of our discussions when we met with [the banks]." Arising from the deliberations connected with the theological paper, the economic crisis, and its impact upon homeowners and those in debt, "In our first big meeting with Bank of America," Taylor continued, "we laid out a proposal, a massive proposal, for principal reduction for everybody under water in the U.S." as well as "how it should be done." The proposal offered a mutual compromise between homeowners and lenders, allowing lenders to hold their losses in "purgatory" while joining with the homeowner to save their home. Eventually, the bank's losses could be redeemed after the market stabilized and home values began to rise again, outlining a way for the bank and the homeowner to share the appreciation. It was a solution discerned within a process of political judgment that took a more long term view; and one that also took the larger social implications of these decisions into consideration while recognizing the structures in play. As Taylor commented, the proposal actually offered a way for "[the banks] to be the good guys," while providing a socially just solution and a new perspective on how to do business as a bank.

The banks, however, were not willing to go along with the proposal. Yet, as meetings with Bank of America continued, executives began to consider the possibility of principal write-down for a segment of the mortgages they held, a slight consolation for distressed homeowners that was implemented intermittently. Nevertheless, even as these negotiations carried on, lenders and servicers (Bank of America included) continued to foreclose on properties with the same celerity. In response, NC United Power once again attempted to slow the process by pressing elected officials to implement legislation that would institute a change in how the banks handled foreclosures. In March of 2010, they organized visits to congressional delegates in Washington, DC to press for help on foreclosure along with expanded economic relief for military families and veterans. Similarly, leaders and clergy working with sister organizations within Metro IAF and across the nation were able to garner an agreement from the Obama Administration to allow principal write-down for those homeowners who were underwater.<sup>71</sup> As the banks continued to forestall on this issue, NC United Power along with these other national IAF affiliates asked officials to take the time to investigate foreclosures. In the meantime, they attempted to leverage some power against the banks by engaging in a campaign to organize private account holders as well as municipal and state treasurers to withdraw their money from these institutions. Due in part to the fact that NC United Power continued to filter stories of problems to his office of consumer protection and to alert him to the issues of duplicitous procedures and suspicious documentation, by mid fall of 2010 NC Attorney General Roy Cooper was ready to suspend all foreclosure proceedings

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<sup>71</sup> NC United Power Progress Report, April 2010.

in the state. And in what was one of the biggest victories to date in this effort, Bank of America, the biggest lender and servicer in the U.S., announced on October 9th that it was halting all foreclosures across the country until it could sort out the confusion. The freeze, the bank made clear, would apply not just to homes it was taking back itself, but also on homes it was servicing for mortgage buyers Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.<sup>72</sup> NC United Power had been able to disrupt the flow of the process through its persistent efforts to obtain a hearing and to slow procedures down.

The broad disruption of bank-administered foreclosure processes, however, was only short lived. Within a few months, Bank of America, along with other lending institutions, resumed its processing of foreclosures after having determined for itself that the problems within the process had been resolved. A later external audit would suggest, however, that instead of resolving the problems the banks simply resumed the practice of illegally accelerating foreclosure proceedings against homeowners. Additionally, this audit would reveal that at the same time they also were cheating taxpayers by presenting falsified paperwork to the Federal Housing Administration in their applications for reimbursement on homes that sold for less than the outstanding loan amount.<sup>73</sup> Recognizing that the stoppage was likely to be short-lived, in December of 2010 representatives from NC United Power in collaboration with other citizens groups and IAF affiliates met with the Attorney General of Iowa, Tom Miller, in Des Moines. Miller

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<sup>72</sup> Kristen Valle, Rick Rothacker, Mark Siebel, with contributions from the Associated Press and Bloomberg News, "BofA halts foreclosures," *Charlotte Observer*, October 9, 2010, available at: <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2010/10/08/1747554/bofa-to-halt-us-foreclosures.html>

<sup>73</sup> Shahien Nasiripour, "Confidential Federal Audits Accuse Five Biggest Mortgage Firms of Defrauding Taxpayers," *Huffington Post*, May 16, 2011, available at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/05/16/foreclosure-fraud-audit-false-claims-act\\_n\\_862686.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/05/16/foreclosure-fraud-audit-false-claims-act_n_862686.html)

had been designated as the lead negotiator for the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) with the banks on the foreclosure crisis. Following up on this, leaders from NC United Power initiated two more meetings in the subsequent months with North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper, who was also serving as the president of NAAG. As Mikael Broadway, a key leader in NC United Power's effort on this front, recounted, these meetings were set "to discuss progress and emphasize the need for justice for homeowners. We continued to hope there would be a resolution in the near future." Though meetings with the Attorney General were positive and hopeful, the banks continued to run people unfairly through a complex, confusing, and often broken modification process that either failed to produce the proper documents, operated in dual-track fashion to pursue foreclosure even while communicating with the homeowner that they were working to modify the loan, or (as the organization was beginning to find out) falsified the paperwork to push them toward foreclosure and eviction.

With banks remaining generally unreceptive to NC United Power's request to meet with homeowners, to listen to them, and to consider revising their foreclosure process, leaders and clergy, extrapolating from their own procedures for working through disagreements, decided it was time to make the conflict more public. To this extent, a collective action was planned for April 12, 2011 at the Westin Hotel in downtown Charlotte, NC. The time and location were selected because the CEO of Bank of America Brian Moynihan was to meet with key state officials there before he addressed a gathering of the Attorneys General attending the 2011 Presidential Initiative Summit on "America's Financial Recovery: Protecting Consumers as We Rebuild." The action

began with prayer, as clergy and homeowners from across the state gathered in the main lobby of the hotel. Encircled together and holding hands, they petitioned God for help, praying that God would soften the hearts of bank executives and lead their elected officials toward justice. After the prayer vigil, NC United Power hosted a press conference with the purpose of publicly confronting the banks on the issue of foreclosure, hoping not only that the banks would listen but also to influence the Attorneys General to represent their voice in the discussion. Holding a sign that read, “Remove your blindfolds. Work with us and not against us!” Jenny Barker, a homeowner from Highpoint, NC facing foreclosure, publically called on bank officials, imploring, “All I ask is that you work with us. We are people, we have a story. We are not in foreclosure or unemployed because we want to be. We ask that you work with us so we can get our lives back together.” Her request was for patience, clemency, and understanding and to offer her and her husband, who had both fallen into unemployment, *more time*. Appealing to the God of “justice, love, and compassion,” these clergy and homeowners pursued a path of political judgment that invited the leaders of Bank of America and elected officials to look for a resolution that reflected these qualities.<sup>74</sup>

Though initially almost kicked out of the lobby by hotel security, to their surprise a small group of the clergy and homeowners were granted a face-to-face meeting with

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<sup>74</sup> While I participated in this press conference and prayer vigil and have in part relied on my own notes and recollection, I also referred to news reports of the event in writing this account. For reports of this press conference, both written and audio/visual, see: Richard Devayne, “Homeowners in fear of foreclosure meet with top man at BOA”; Julie Rose, “BofA CEO: ‘Fairness Is a Major Concern,’” *National Public Radio WFAE 90.7* (Charlotte, NC), April 12, 2011; and Rick Rothacker and Kirsten Valle Pittman, “Officials urge Bank of America to take ‘personal interest’ in mortgage concerns,” *Charlotte Observer*, April 13, 2011, available at: <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2011/04/13/2219062/bofa-ags-discuss-reforms.html>

Brian Moynihan as he was on his way to address the gathering of the Attorneys General. Accompanied by Bank of America Global Corporate Social Responsibility Executive Andrew Plepler, lead organizer Gerald Taylor and two other NC United Power members greeted Moynihan and spoke with him briefly about their issues. During this meeting Moynihan personally thanked Taylor and NC United Power for the work they had done to reassert limits on interest rates for active military families and he promised to make his staff available for future meetings to discuss issues surrounding foreclosure. Furthermore, he invited representatives of NC United Power to accompany him in his meeting with the Attorneys General, and specifically mentioned Gerald Taylor in his speech acknowledging the work of NC United Power on these difficult economic issues. While Moynihan would argue in his speech that the bank did not think principal reduction was the way to proceed in solving the foreclosure crisis, through the action NC United Power was able to generate the tension necessary to at least begin some real conversations. As an internal report stated, “The overall reaction of the Attorneys General and Moynihan show the importance of long-term efforts and consistency in pressing forward on the agenda, even when powerful institutions and busy government leaders seem unlikely to budge.” An opening seemed to have emerged during this action, one these organizers saw as an unforeseen possibility to move “in the direction of fairness and justice toward homeowners, borrowers, military families, and all who suffer because of the careless and reckless actions of financial institutions which led to the current economic conditions.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> NC United Power, “Significant Progress on NC United Power Foreclosure Campaign,” April 2011, internal press release, 1.

By challenging the process of economic recovery orchestrated by the financial institutions such as Bank of America, NC United Power was able, if ever so slightly, to disrupt and decelerate this process, to gain recognition for homeowners struggling with foreclosure, and to publically hold lending and servicing institutions accountable by interjecting an alternative process that opened the possibility for more just solutions.

### *The Theo-politics of Contretemps*

As shown in the account I have provided, the work of NC United Power attempted to slow and disrupt the process of foreclosure with a more personal, patient, and deliberative mode of political judgment. Below, I will argue that this work can be understood as the enactment of new temporality born of an apocalyptic subjectivity oriented to the reign of Christ. In the final section of this chapter, therefore, I want to pull together the components of my argument to clarify how the granular activity of congregation-based organizing embodies a theo-politics of *contretemps* extrapolated and extended from the apocalyptic practice of binding and loosing. While, as I argued in section one, capital configures time according to exchange and infinite accumulation, I will now assert that the church's sacred social processes manifests a new and different time, one given to it by God. Moreover, given that the tempo and rhythm of this time are the means by which the community's relations are harmonized and synchronize to God's reign, to the extent that NC United Power was able to embody a process derived from this tempo and rhythm they were able to challenge the grip of capital and finance and to pursue justice for distressed homeowners. Hence, both in witness to the new temporal life

opened up by Christ and in service to a world lost in the fleeting time of capital accumulation, participants in congregation-based organizing were able to take the time to enact a countervailing process of political judgment orchestrated by the rhythm, pace, and content of this alternative time. In doing so, I argue, they can be understood as seeking to extend the reign of God into the world and, by extrapolating from their own social process(es), having employed a time in accord with the divine *use* and *purpose* of leading the world toward God's justice.

Jacques Derrida introduces the concept of *contretemps* as part of his playful diagnosis of late modern politics in *Specters of Marx*. Taking his lead from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, wherein the prince of Denmark continues to be disturbed by the ghost of his murdered father the King, for Derrida the specter of Marx haunts global capitalism as a troubled spirit arising from the ache of a society pulled out of joint. At the heart of an unfettered and regnant capital, as I have argued, is a dislocated sense of time as homogenous units for exchange and accumulation represented in the empty form of money. In such a state, Derrida asserts, "The age is off its hinges. Everything, beginning with time, seems out of kilter, unjust, dis-adjusted," as the time of quantifiable instants and unlimited accumulation distorts the form and pace of socio-political relations.<sup>76</sup> To this extent, the public thing (*res publica*) itself has changed, having been stretched and wielded to the interest of finance on the most basic level of creaturely existence: time/space. Justice and political judgment are distorted and disfigured; things are not as they should be. Given the madness and the dissonance of the time, therefore, resistance

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<sup>76</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 96.



must take the form of a practice of *contretemps*, or, the practice of a different mode of political judgment resonant with a different time. *Contretemps*, as Derrida develops it, is thus the “political virtue” of enacting a heterogeneous time within the temporal order of the regnant regime, a tempo that seeks to right these distorted relations. It is the performance of an alternative way of operating that seeks justice and, even when unrecognized or suppressed, witnesses to it.<sup>77</sup> The struggle against the global reign of a disfigured political economy is, in this view, a struggle for time itself, a resistance enacted in the practice of an alternative time.

The “art of *contretemps*,” according to Derrida, therefore, is the process of an alternative political judgment situated within and shaped by a different configuration of time.<sup>78</sup> Moving at its own pace and rhythm, it disrupts the mechanical time of capital, the homogenous, rectilinear, and empty time of accumulation and exchange. In this way, the practice of *contretemps* is a technique of reintroducing politics to a post-political culture by disrupting the smooth world of late, global capital. Derived from a different sphere of judgment, with its own rhythm and tempo, the art of *contretemps* interjects its own cadence into the larger public realm, enacting a discordant time. Given that “politics is precisely the point where... discordant times intersect,” the public practice of a new time

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 110. Derrida states, “I believe in the political virtue of the *contretemps*. And if a *contretemps* does not have the good luck, a more or less calculated luck, to come *just in time*, then the inopportuneness of a strategy (political or other) may still *bear witness*, precisely [justement], to justice, bear witness, at least, to the justice which is demanded and about which we were saying a moment ago that it must be disadjusted, irreducible to exactness [justesse] and to law.”

<sup>78</sup> Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times*, 4.

initiates conflict and debate.<sup>79</sup> By initiating conflict and debate, allowing the friction, rifts, and fissures to arise from the intersection of discordant times, the possibility for a political judgment that does not rely on capital to resolve conflicts and to discern outcomes can be employed.<sup>80</sup> Thus, the aim of *contretemps* is not simply to acknowledge discordant times, but to publicly enact these heterogeneous times in order to reinstate politics. In short, *contretemps* points to the possibility of resistance through the enactment of a qualitatively different temporality. A “now-time” [*Jetztzeit*] as Benjamin would call it or “a *cairology*” for Agamben, in its qualitative heterogeneity it challenges the homogenization of time under the reign of capital and resists reabsorption under its hegemony.<sup>81</sup> To practice the art of *contretemps*, then, is to subvert and to resist the depoliticization of life under capital by inhabiting a distinct tempo and rhythm of life embodied in its own mode of judgment. Only by recovering time in an alternative process can a real challenge to the regnant way of resolving conflicts and making decisions under capital be posed.

Of course, for Derrida (and for Agamben, Negri, and Bensaïd) the practice of *contretemps* does not imply a teleology. Neither is it engendered by the invasion of the transcendent God into human history, initiating a profound cosmological transformation.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 22. While I do not have space to engage the full breadth of his argument, the ecological is, according to Bensaïd, one of the most obvious places where the conflict of times can be seen. He states, “The quarrel between ecology and economies (as understood by classical and neoclassical economies at least) refers to the divorce between two heterogeneous temporalities: an economic temporality punctuated by the reproduction of capital and labour-power; and an ecological temporality governed by the storing and consumption of energy, which is also stored time” (344).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>81</sup> Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 115; Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938-1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. and ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006), 395.

Instead, for Derrida, as is the case with Agamben and Bensaïd though not exactly with Negri, the practice of *contretemps* remains a secularized form of messianic eschatology, one gutted of its theological (and certainly Christian) content. Yet, I think it nonetheless provides us with a helpful interpretive framework for making sense of the activity of the churches involved in the work of NC United Power and congregation-based grassroots organizing more broadly. For situated within a theological register, the practice of *contretemps* will help me better clarify what I have called the “apocalyptic style” that informs their actions. Because its organizing process is based in the theo-political practice of the new age most centrally embodied in the exercise of the rule of Christ, I suggest, congregation-based grassroots organizing operates within a time discordant to that of capital, offering an alternative way to engage conflicts and discover more just resolutions. Configured by the rhythm and tempo of the structuring practices and processes of its member churches, therefore, congregation-based organizing serves as a vehicle for extending and extrapolating these practices in witness and service to the world by embodying a new way of dealing with the conflicts and wrongs as a result of things being imbalanced and out of joint. Relying on the time and the process that God has provided the church for restoring its equilibrium, for learning new information and making adjustments, and for reconciling, congregation-based organizing learns from this sacral process how to take its time in making political judgments, discovering creative and practical alternatives, and working within the structures to bring about change. Apocalyptically oriented and predisposed to trusting that the Spirit will be active in the practice of binding and loosing, churches can imbue the activity of organizing with real

hope, power, and concern. Furthermore, because the church knows that the everyday settling of disputes through deliberation and discernment is itself sacred, indeed, that the quotidian is the place where faith is enacted and where the reign of Christ matters, it also knows that it is in these everyday issues and concerns that the impact of the kingdom of God upon the world is felt and actualized. When it acts accordingly, the church finds in congregation-based organizing a faithful channel for witnessing to justice and for serving to reinvigorate democratic politics by contesting the individualization and vacuity of late, modern life.

As a way of beginning to pull together the loose ends of my argument and to clarify my understanding of community organizing as an extension of the theo-political practice of time, I think it will be helpful briefly to recall the main aspects of the theology of congregation-based community organizing I developed in the first part of this study. In chapter one I argued that God has invaded the world in Jesus Christ and in doing so has conquered the powers of the cosmos, subjecting all things to Christ and reconfiguring life to his reign. As those initiated into the reign of Christ, therefore, Christians are formed by an apocalyptic orientation that reconstitutes them as subjects within the transformed cosmos of the new age of his rule. I need not rehash here every element of the apocalyptic consciousness I detailed earlier, but for the sake of delineating the connection to the work of NC United Power I want to stress the way in which the new subjectivity of the Christian springs from inhabiting a new, alternative time. In resonance to the occurrence of Jesus, I suggested in chapter two, the new life of the believer takes shape in within a constellation of structuring processes and practices consonant with God's reign,

endowing her with a disposition, imagination, and ethic oriented by the content of this event.<sup>82</sup> A certain rhythm and tempo, therefore, configure the pattern of relations of the social, historical community of the church, constituting it as a new humanity, the first fruits of creaturely existence whose time is being healed.<sup>83</sup> Critical to this community, I argued was a sacred process that, when practiced, allowed them to stay on track and to harmonize and resync the social body when it fell out of step or became imbalanced. Corresponding to their apocalyptic political subjectivity rooted in the qualitative transformation of time initiated in Jesus Christ was the ethico-political culture of the church, whose structuring practices embody this time.

I also proposed that this apocalyptic perspective and its corresponding way of life not only allows the church to critically intuit how the structure of things in rebellion is disjointed, but moreover, because its processes and practices resonate with the new age of God's reign they function as a means of witness and service to the world. As an alternative socio-political body whose relations are synchronized to Christ's rule, it presents a new and distinct alternative to the world and creatively seeks ways to extend this alternative. "This is the original revolution:" as Yoder puts it, "the creation of a distinct community with its own deviant set of values and its coherent way of incarnating

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<sup>82</sup> As Yoder puts it, "To celebrate, and to celebrate repeatedly in memory of Jesus, the glory of God as righteous and as sovereign means to cultivate explicitly an alternative consciousness, to maintain a sense of reality running against the stream of the unquestioningly accepted commonplaces of the age." Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 123.

<sup>83</sup> J. Christiaan Beker notes that "the Christ-event makes it possible for Paul to speak about the proleptic new in the present that is ushering in the full glory of God." J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), 152. As Yoder puts it, the apocalyptic subjectivity that characterizes the community of believers that is the church is "primordial in the sense of orientation," due to the fact that "[they] can only be on [their] way because of that prior coming." Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 119, 104.

them.”<sup>84</sup> In short, because time for them is qualitatively reconfigured by the content of the new age, their life in this new time takes on a new rhythm and tempo, keen on generating waves and impacting the surrounding society. As a social body in its own right, it gathers “to do business in His name, to find what it means here and now to put into practice this different quality of life which is God’s promise to them and to the world and their promise to God and service to the world,” as a beachhead and pilot of the new age.<sup>85</sup> And the distinct culture of this community, acting in and by a qualitatively heterogeneous time to that of accumulation and exchange, can find in congregation-based organizing a faithful vehicle for its interface with the world because this activity is an extension and extrapolation of the very culture of the church. For those involved in the work of NC United Power, the practice of prayer and the patient process of conflict resolution meant that they could take their time, not needing to hurry, and the economics of the table offered the option of mutual provision. For troubled homeowners, this meant working to decelerate foreclosures and to develop creative alternatives for starting conversation with the banks, like the idea of shared appreciation mortgages that came out of the discussions which had occurred at St. Martin’s in Charlotte, NC.

The practice of binding and loosing is the connective link, or the hinge, between the church’s own culture and the activity of congregation-based organizing. This sacred process is no utopian ideal or mystical ritual disconnected from the reality of its temporal existence, but it is a way of engaging together to determine what it means to be the body

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<sup>84</sup> Yoder, *Original Revolution*, 28.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

of Christ in a specific context, within certain conditions, and in response to real issues. The church's distinct way of dealing with conflict that lies at the heart of its culture is also the heart of congregation-based community organizing. Oriented by the new humanity revealed and made possible in Christ, the church does not overlook or neglect conflict; neither does it picture politics within the church or between the church and the world as free from conflict. Instead, it approaches conflict and change differently, seeing it as a place for critical discernment, believing that God will show up to lead the community forward to resolution and reconciliation. For the church, there is a sacred process for settling everyday disputes and conflicts. The process of making decisions, the process of political judgment, of deliberation and discernment has a sacral tempo and rhythm. To this extent, the community possesses its own peculiar way of making political judgments, its own practical rationality which is extended and extrapolated in organizing. By attempting to sacralize the process of foreclosures, interjecting the sacred rhythm given to the church for settling disputes and dealing with conflicts, NC United Power was able to disrupt, decelerate, and, to some extent, reconfigure the distorted process of foreclosures. Seeing conflict as an opportunity for learning new information and a path to making needed change, moreover, it can take time to resolve disputes in a way that leads to better understanding, reconciliation, social renewal, and mutual respect and love. As it binds and looses, the church actually "[trusts] in the Spirit's leading in contextual application," a path it can also shrewdly pursue in its interface with the world and its powers as exhibited in NC United Power's campaign.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 9.

Pervading the process of binding and loosing, and what makes it such a potent tactic against the homogenizing thrust of capital, as I have suggested, is an alternative time, a time determined by God's purposes and *use*. In this practice, therefore, a certain theological pragmatics is operative wherein the community discerns how the kingdom of God can be brought to bear on a context and situation. Not only is this theological pragmatics apocalyptic in its style, but it is also, as a result, missional. Recalling the read of St. Paul offered by Giorgio Agamben in chapter one, just as he instructs the Corinthians in how to make use of their positions through the new vocation of the divine purpose, the same messianic gathering of time upon itself (*sunestalmenos*) orients the political judgment of the community with a sense of how to use its context in order to infiltrate the world with the kingdom of God (I Cor. 7:29).<sup>87</sup> By taking its time in relation to the world, remaining in step with the rhythm and tempo of the reign of God, the church can open the events, crises, and occurrences of the world to divine purposes, recognizing that the old form of things is passing away (v. 31). The church can engage around the issues that arise in the society where it finds itself confident that God's purposes can be served and discerned, allowing them in some ways to redefine and reconstitute things to the rule of Christ by operating within them in a different way.<sup>88</sup> Like the gathering of the

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<sup>87</sup> Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 26, 43.

<sup>88</sup> Thorlief Boman, in *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, trans. Jules L. Moreau (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), makes a helpful distinction between the view of time the dominates Western thinking and the Hebrew understanding of time. Whereas the Greeks, as well as their European progeny, tend to view time with respect to space, representing time geometrically, for the Hebrews, "time is determined by its content" (131). Time, that is to say, is actively and dynamically filled, lived and not grasped as an successive flow of empty and individual units or points. Indicating the essential difference, he continues, "In any case, the shortest time in Hebrew is not a point, nor a distance, nor a duration, but a beat..." and as a result, "the Israelites understood time as something qualitative, because for them time is determined by its content" (136-37). Hence, collective life inhabiting time was experienced and represented



uterus or the gathering of the heart, the contraction is also the moment of parturition and propulsion, and coincides with an opening up that allows for the birth or the sending out of the new. Within the structure of the old age and amidst its power, God's invasion of the world has opened up a qualitatively new operational time, the time given by God to be used for reconciliation and the restoration of the true mode of creaturely existence.

Against the distorted and homogeneously quantified time of accumulation and exchange, the sacral process of binding and loosing operates in a mode of deliberation and discernment that privileges face-to-face interactions, forgiveness, mutual agreement, community input and arbitration, and the possibility of reconciliation and starting anew. From the pattern of relations established in baptism, the table, the recognition of gifts, the community meeting, and most centrally in the social process of binding and loosing, the church publicly practices an art of *contretemps*, infiltrating the processes of capital and its time with an alternative mode of operation determined by a different purpose. And congregation-based community organizing is the coordinated activity of this operation, a movement of interface between these two times (or two ages) through which friction, drag, and pressure are extended on to the world. Coordinated in such a revolutionary

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rhythmically, stressing the content of time over the content of space (134). In this respect, not only does the individual understand her own identity as the unified story of her life-world collected within her own consciousness, but also the entire life of the people is considered as a unity and thought together as an identity (137-39). While I am not interested in crude arguments that wish to try to exhume a pure Hebrew/Jewish thought from the taint of Greek influences under Hellenization, I do think this distinction made by Boman is helpful for clarifying an apocalyptic understanding of the time of the new age by stressing a sense of time that is determined by its content.

practice these churches act as something like a minoritarian-experimental bloc,<sup>89</sup> functioning as a witness and servant to the world by posing and extending a different use of time headed in an alternative direction.<sup>90</sup> As theologians Peter Dula and Alex Sider have argued, a radical ecclesiology can become the basis for engagement in radical democracy due to the fact that the believing community understands that conflict is not something to be avoided or something to be solved from the top. But just as the church learns through binding and loosing, so it can lead society in learning by taking the time to engage in conversations that remain open to the unforeseeable.<sup>91</sup> Through community organizing, in short, the new mode of political judgment at work in the church is put to the service of the world. Because, as Yoder puts it, this process is “evangelical” and as such “tells the world what is the world’s own calling and destiny...,” it is a “[mode] of vulnerable but also provocative, creative presence in [the world’s] midst,” and in presenting its own unique way of dealing with conflict not only witnesses publicly to an alternative but also serves to “transform culture.”<sup>92</sup>

As the extension of the church’s own rhythm of life and political judgment to the world, congregation-based organizing is a faithful embodiment of its mission. Socially and politically, it can function in this way as “pilot project, and podium, pedagogical base and sometime power base,” even as it resists the temptation to take control or to manage

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<sup>89</sup> I am alluding here to elements of Gramsci’s notion of a “historic bloc.” See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 366.

<sup>90</sup> Beker notes that “Paul’s ‘high ecclesiology’ suggests not only a messianic life-style within the church but also a revolutionary impact on the values of the world, to which the church is sent out as agent of transformation and beachhead of the dawning kingdom of God.” Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 319.

<sup>91</sup> Peter Dula and Alex Sider, “Radical Democracy, Radical Ecclesiology,” *Crosscurrents* 55, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 488.

<sup>92</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 373.

things.<sup>93</sup> As a real alternative, it juxtaposes the market's way of resolving conflicts, of making decisions, and of discerning outcomes. The process of binding and loosing, therefore, as Yoder states, "can provide a resource for change in personalities and in structures," and can "be a model as well for other social relationships."<sup>94</sup> Because the church has been given time to learn, to listen, to reconcile and resolve conflicts within a process of judgment determined by the rule of Christ, it offers a basis when brought together through the work of community organizing for challenging the global order and political judgment tied to the empty and homogenous time of capital exchange and accumulation. Recognizing that the pursuit of justice takes time and requires that that time be used in a certain way, churches active in the work of community organizing can pose a countervailing force to the drive for accumulation and growth operating at the center of global capital through the practice and embodiment of a *contretemps* that has real content.

By this point I hope it is already becoming evident how the work of NC United Power operated within a mode of *contretemps*, drawing from the church's distinct process of binding and loosing to proffer an alternative method of political judgment. Nonetheless, I want to connect the group's actions to decelerate and modify foreclosure

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 126. As Yoder also notes, and as I have argued previously, the basis of this view of the church springs from the fact that "the early church believed that God was at work within the church by means of Jesus Christ living on within it." And of course for them, Yoder emphasizes, the fact that Christ was present in the church was most evident in the cruciform life of the believing community. He continues, "they viewed [the cross] as something that belongs to the very essence of God's salvation plan for the world. The cross-carrying following which the church practices, that is the continuing life of Jesus through his Spirit in the members of his body, is not an implication, something to be tacked on; rather it is part of his saving work." John Howard Yoder, *Discipleship as Political Responsibility*, trans. Timothy J. Geddert (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 22.

<sup>94</sup> Yoder, *Body Politics*, 11.

more explicitly to an apocalyptically informed practice of alternative time. Shaped by a peculiar sense of justice and right social relations determined by the new age of Christ communicated in scripture and embodied in baptism and the table, churches actively participating in the work of NC United Power approached the foreclosure crisis from a different perspective, seeking to resolve the issues another way. By extending and extrapolating from their own way of resolving conflicts and restoring equilibrium embodied in the sacred practice of binding and loosing, they challenged the flow of procedures correlated to capital accumulation and efficiency. Following the general path of conflict resolution outlined in Matthew 18, as I have shown, the process for them began with a particular conflict, a concrete offense. Taking the time to listen, to engage in individual and house meetings, NC United Power offered a place for stories of wrongful bank treatment to emerge, such as those told by Marcella Robinson, Rosetta Johnson, Lamonya Kirkland, and Jenny Barker. While these financial institutions, whether they were functioning as lenders or servicers, were not interested in considering the homeowner's needs, working with them, or even really listening to their grievances, NC United Power sought to implement a process that countered the banks' hurried and distorted procedures. For homeowners struggling through the economic downturn to keep their homes, it was clear that a slanted and one-sided process orchestrated by the banks for their own benefit and primarily to protect their profits was dictating the pace and path of foreclosures. With initial attempts by homeowners to address these issues being rebuffed or ignored, it was clear that those in distress needed another option.

Attempting to better address the foreclosure crisis and the problems emerging from the collapse of the housing bubble, NC United Power's campaign around this issue sought to initiate face-to-face meetings between banks and homeowners as the first step in the process of resolving these conflicts more equitably. As in the process of binding and loosing, the idea here was to give struggling homeowners a fair hearing and hopefully to get the banks to recognize the plight of these individuals. At the same time, the group pressed the banks to take more accountability for the housing crisis, instead of simply shifting all the blame to homebuyers. With respect to the processing of foreclosures, NC United Power also prodded banks to slow down by offering delinquent homeowners more time and extending grace to those who had lost jobs as a result of the collapse of the economy. Additionally, NC United Power began to work within its own ranks to discover more fair and just resolutions, using the system in order to see how mutually agreeable resolutions could be formed. Thus, on the one hand, in bringing people together to give public voice to their grievances against the banks, NC United Power worked to extrapolate from the process of resolving conflicts established in the rule of Christ in the hope of decelerating foreclosures and holding banks more accountable for their actions. In doing so, they acted to disrupt the flow of the foreclosures by introducing an alternative process. On the other hand, by making use of the gifts and skills of those within the congregations of its own organization, as witnessed in the episode of binding and loosing at St. Martin's in Charlotte, NC, NC United Power worked from its own process of conflict resolution pragmatically to develop for more creative and equitable solutions. As an extension of this process, it then sought to

introduce that solution as a starting point for conversations with the banks going forward. Working from a sacred process of deliberation and conflict resolution, one based in a different sense of time and moving according to its own tempo and rhythm, NC United Power developed its own sense of how to proceed forward within the context of the foreclosure crisis by extending and extrapolating this sacred process in search of more just resolutions.

Moreover, without seizing control or attempting to manage the housing or economic crisis from above, NC United Power worked within the structure of things to implement more just relations. Operating within the structures, but opening them by taking their time, they sought a way of reconfiguring them by filling them with more accountability and clemency. As evidenced in the way they approached the banks, the Attorney General of North Carolina, and NAAG, NC United Power engaged these structures by challenging them to live up to the values they espoused in the statements they made and in the image they portrayed of themselves. To break open and reconfigure the process dictated by the efficiency and expediency of capital, NC United Power sought to fill this time differently and thereby to alter the complete process. Taking up the time of executives and officials, they used this time to repoliticize the foreclosure process, redirecting and reordering it from a time of efficiency to that of deliberation and collective discernment. Shrewdly making use of the structures and their own position, by calling for face-to-face meetings, lobbying legislators, hosting press conferences, and conducting public actions, the organization attempted to insert its own process, creating the possibility of holding these institutions and figures accountable while offering to

work with them to discover an alternative path forward. Relying on a sacred process privileged in the life of the church as depicted in its scriptures, they sought to sacralize the situation from within by opening up foreclosure proceedings.

Meeting capital on the level of time, NC United Power was able to pose an alternative mode of political judgment, challenging the time of exchange and accumulation that orchestrates the process of capital with a sense of time put to the *use* of God's purposes. In this way, it was able to provide a public witness and service within a culture shaped by the forces of global capital, opening it up for alternative resolutions to the foreclosure crisis that shared responsibility, offered reasonable grace, and considered the interests of the entire society. Through this campaign churches were able to extend and extrapolate from the qualitatively different rhythm and tempo of the rule of Christ to take the time for democratic agitation and political engagement in pursuit of more just processes and resolutions, cultivating and internal cultural challenge to the dominance of capital.<sup>95</sup>

Consistent with the practice of binding and loosing, a sense of hopeful expectancy pervaded NC United Power's work, trusting that God would show up to provide a way of resolving these conflicts and to make harmony, forgiveness, and justice a possibility. As was the case with the series of theological discussions that took place at St. Martin's, which later provided the plan for shared-appreciation, and NC United Power's vigil and press conference at the Westin Hotel in downtown Charlotte, NC, prayer suffused the entire campaign and its actions. Deliberations were conducted in the faith that the Spirit

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<sup>95</sup> As Sheldon Wolin reminds us, "Democratic agitation takes time." Wolin, "Agitated Times," 11.

would lead. Extending the rule of Christ, the effort of the churches involves in NC United Power was theologically determined, “pioneering a paradigmatic demonstration of both the power and the practices that define the shape of restored humanity” to reach practical agreements instead of relying on a calculus of profit or accumulation.<sup>96</sup> Apocalyptically oriented, the campaign operated within a mode of engagement that expected forgiveness, repentance, grace, love, and justice could work in the world just as effectively as they do in the church, allowing them to patiently pursue these by pressing an alternative process guided by mutual provision and open discussion.

Finally, because the activity of congregation-based community organizing rests so heavily upon the tools of conflict resolution and political judgment, it also serves to reskill churches in these important processes and procedures. In this respect, community organizing also presents an opportunity for congregations to relearn and rehabilitate the practice of binding and loosing, forming a symbiotic relationship where the congregation benefits from the rediscovery and performance of its constitutive way of negotiating conflict and offering forgiveness. Instead of shying away from conflict or avoiding difficult issues where no simple or decisive conclusion is immediately attainable, churches engaged in community organizing begin to recover the tools they possess for navigating a complex and changing world, for reconciling divisions, and for discerning their own life in time. Helping them to rediscover the crucial church practice of binding and loosing, community organizing, that is to say, provides an opportunity for the church

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<sup>96</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 373.



to better inhabit a time determined by the content of the rule of Christ and to learn to *use* the time it has been given in order to embody and extend this reign.

### *Conclusion*

While the reign of capital has achieved global hegemony through its configuration of time, the church knows instead that time is determined by the event of Christ and by his sovereignty. As Barth reminds us, “Jesus is risen and is the Lord of time. And therefore we can say positively of man that in the true nature in which God sees him he is not destroyed, but has real time and may live in it.”<sup>97</sup> The transformation of church’s experience of time in the event of Christ orients it within a completely new reality as a community of subjects liberated to inhabit God’s reign over the refashioned cosmos. The church is the people constituted within this new time and oriented apocalyptically to the age of this reign. For them, time is not comprised of empty, homogenous units that can be exchanged and accumulated but is being filled with the substance of divine purpose. In Christ, time remains open to communion with God, freeing creaturely existence from the

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<sup>97</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, 553. Previously Barth noted that “The mission of the Son actually brings the fullness of time with it, and not *vice versa*. With the mission of the Son, with His entry into the time process, a new era of time has dawned, so far-reaching in its consequences that it may be justly called the fullness of time. Man has now reached maturity. He has become God’s son and heir, the ‘Lord of all.’ He has become a free man. This is the event which gives time its fullness. But the term *πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου* has a further meaning. This event does not merely make this particular time fulfilled time. This fulfilled time is before or after all other time. Hence, it makes all time, *χρόνος* as such, in the sequence and succession of which this fulfillment was achieved, fulfilled time. The *raison d’être* of all time, both past and future, is that there should be this fulfillment at this particular time. Time may seem to move into the void but it is actually moving towards this event; just as it may seem to move out of the void, but it is actually moving from this event. The fulfillment of time has now ‘come,’ epitomising all the coming and going of time. Henceforth all time can be regarded only as time fulfilled in this particular time” (459).

reign of all other powers and structures, even the global power of capital.<sup>98</sup> Abiding in this new age parturied by Christ, the church as Christ's body in the Spirit is enabled to deliberate and make political judgments that enact an alternative to capital time and instead flow with the "order of redemption."<sup>99</sup> Binding and loosing is what allows it to abide here, taking the time God has given it to resync and conform itself within creaturely existence to the justice, forgiveness, and love of God.

In a way that moves beyond a Marxist critique of capital, I suggest, it is the true independence and freedom of the church that establishes the possibility for a real alternative to the order of global capital. I have argued that it is this possibility which is present in the activity of congregation-based community organizing as represented in the work of NC United Power. Apocalyptically oriented within a time determined by the event of Christ, as Yoder puts it, "does not mean sacrificing concern for liberation with the social process in favor of delayed gratification in heaven, or abandoning efficacy in favor of purity." But instead, "It means that in Jesus we have a clue to which kinds of causation, which kinds of community-building, which kinds of conflict management, go with the grain of the cosmos, of which we know, as Caesar [and capital] does not, that Jesus is both the Word (the inner logic of things) and the Lord ('sitting at the right hand')."<sup>100</sup> It is this peculiar mode of community-building and conflict management

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<sup>98</sup> In his assessment of Barth's theology, Timothy Gorringer concludes that, for Barth, "Christ in the Spirit empowers us to a life of resistance and revolt. A free life, according to Barth's picture, is a life of guerilla warfare, the life of a resistance fighter, but in the Spirit of joy, celebration, and thankfulness, and always *for* human beings and never against them." Timothy Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 267.

<sup>99</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 371.

<sup>100</sup> Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 246.

determined by an apocalyptic grasp of causation that resides at the heart of congregation-based community organizing, suffusing it with the practice of a new time. Operating within a time determined by the invasion of God's justice and love, it extends the practice of the rule of Christ through binding and loosing by playing upon this new time to resist and counteract the quantified time of exchange and accumulation under capital. In doing so, congregation-based community organizing presents a way of working "*within* the system of the real world" to pursue the kingdom of God. Far from seeking to destroy the world and its structures, instead this mode of missional engagement seeks to renew this world by opening it and stretching it in way that "lies farther in the same direction in which we are being led."<sup>101</sup> Not only, that is to say, does the church as it enacts a new time taste the first fruits of real freedom, but it also makes *use* of this freedom and the time it has been given through the activity of community organizing to work for justice and to actualize Christ's reign. As the practice of *contretemps*, the activity of congregation-based organizing exhibited in the work of NC United Power on foreclosure resisted the capturing of time by capital, disrupting it and countering it with an alternative mode of political judgment.

By resisting the homogenization of life under global capital, the collective practice of the new age in the culture of the church through the missional vehicle of congregation-based community organizing not only opens time but, in doing so, it also opens history to a new future. If, as Guy Debord has stated, "within the development of capitalism, irreversible time is *unified on a world scale*," and "universal history becomes

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 245, 241.

a reality because the entire world is gathered under the development of this time,” then the enactment of a qualitatively different time in the church and extended through community organizing engenders a qualitative transformation in history as well.<sup>102</sup> It is this transformation of history and the opening of a new future I want to discuss in the next and final chapter. As I will argue, in contrast to a history driven by enterprising destruction, competition, and accumulation, the missional interface of congregation-based organizing offers to the world an alternative history that moves forward through the forgiveness and reconciliation made possible in Christ and actualized in the apocalyptic practice of the church.

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<sup>102</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 145.

## **Chapter 6**

### **An Open Future:**

### **The Theo-politics of Organizing at the End of History**

I have now reached the culmination of my argument. In the last chapter I argued that the heart of capital's hegemony on a global scale rests in the experience of time it engenders. I then described how the community organizing efforts of NC United Power, in what may seem like small and insignificant ways nonetheless served to disrupt and redirect the temporal process of capital around the issue of foreclosure by taking the time to enact an alternative process. In so doing, NC United Power was able with some effectiveness to open the regnant regime of capital from within through the practice of *contretemps*. Finally, I argued that the work of NC United Power could be understood as a missionary activity of the church, offering in this practice of *contretemps* a different mode of political judgment and a different way of negotiating conflicts through a hopeful and reconciling process of deliberation and discernment. Because within the church the reign of Christ is determinative for the processes by which decisions are made and conflicts are resolved, I asserted, it inhabits a different time, operating according to a unique and sacred tempo as it engages these matters that directs things more toward justice.

In this final chapter, I want to reiterate the argument from the previous chapter with a slightly different valence. While the prior chapter focused on the hold of capital over time, wherein it homogenizes time by configuring it as rectilinear and exchangeable

units, I want in this chapter to look at the corresponding conception of history and the future intrinsic to capital hegemony that provides an overarching and universal sense of how things should move forward and be ordered. In contrast, I will argue that the apocalyptic politics of the church reflected in the practices of congregation-based community organizing moves in ways that may not seem like much when viewed from the top but in fact has a real impact for those families, individuals, and communities on the ground floor of history and society. The apocalyptic conception of history cultivated in the church, therefore, can be a pulpit or pedestal for sustaining the hope, patience, humility, and habits to engage in what Romand Coles has called “the politics of small achievements.”<sup>1</sup> While apocalyptic is often understood to be irrelevant to political practice, I argue that it provides a conception of history (the past, present, and future) apposite for a robust engagement in radical democracy in the same way this conception of history sustains the church’s mode of vulnerable receptivity when it engages its own conflicts. A conception of history derived from the integrity of time open to and configured by the reign of God, apocalyptic provides a way of understanding what is going on that allows the church to attend to the particular circumstances and situations of issues in a way that resists subsuming them under general and universal theories of history that overdetermine the future. As a result, though its political work may seem to be minor or insignificant, as it patiently addresses specific issues and particular circumstances in a way that is receptive to new perspectives and guided by forgiveness

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<sup>1</sup> Coles and Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 4.

the community actually can open up the overarching narrative of capital and move forward toward justice and provision.

My focus in the first section of this chapter will be to describe how the ascendancy of capital has captured history and the future within an overarching theory that locates the meaning and the motor of human existence in the limitless accumulation and consumption made possible by the dynamic force of creative destruction. Accompanying the smoothing out of time that lies at the heart of capital's hegemony is a correlating account of history that presents capital as natural, eternal, and fundamentally liberative. Presented as the end of history, this narrative rationalizes and legitimizes the dominion of capital, capturing the cultural imagination and harnessing the political will to its future. If there is broad cultural resonance with the notion that "It is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism," then it is because capital has succeeded in hiding the historical contingency of its own development, asserting itself instead as eternal and everlasting.<sup>2</sup> In the first section of this chapter, therefore, I offer an extended explication of the theoretical conception of history that undergirds the reign of capital, describing the fundamental ontological, anthropological, and political elements of this meta-narrative as well as the central engine it perceives to move this history along. Imposing this abstract and universal history upon actual events, lives, and occurrences, capital legitimates and rationalizes its order and promotes itself as the natural, highest, and most meaningful possibility for human social and political existence. The effect of this dominant ideology on communities and individuals across the globe is the

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<sup>2</sup> Jameson, "Future City," 76.

overwhelming sense that they inhabit the end of history; that their future must and will be determined by the inevitable laws of the market and its dynamic process of creative destruction.

My explication of this theory of history sets up the second section of this chapter in which I recount the despair and resignation exhibited by those standing on the destructive side of the housing crisis. Through recounting the situation of many active-military and veterans as well as some particular stories of civilian homeowners, I revisit the work of NC United Power in order to describe both the sense of helplessness and unavoidable devastation they were experiencing as the crisis unfolded, but also to point out the way NC United Power's campaign was able to open up new and unforeseeable futures for some of these people. While it may not have been widely publicized or have completely reordered the way the banks were responding to the crisis, in certain situations and circumstances new outcomes were made possible through their work for those facing foreclosure. By introducing an alternative to the universal process of creative destruction and market redistribution, I illustrate how NC United Power was able to gain some relief and modification for some homeowners, securing a few real, though limited, victories through the campaign. Hence, the victory pertaining to the implementation and expansion of the protections of the Servicemember Civil Relief Act (SCRA) and the possibility of principal and interest rate reduction and loan modification associated with the settlement brokered by the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) discussed in previous chapters sets the context for these stories.



Finally, like in the previous chapter, I offer a theological explanation of these successes by situating the work of NC United Power's campaign in connection to the church's alternative conception of history. Whereas capital's account of history is determined by the laws of efficiency, accumulation, and growth, the apocalyptic orientation of the church is determined by the forgiveness, vulnerability, and grace provided in God's victorious reign over the powers accomplished in Christ. Against notions that the general rules of capitalist expansion and profit are the best way to resolve conflicts because they are eternal and natural laws of reality, the church's apocalyptic perspective allows it to attend more to the particulars and specifics of conflicts, moving in forgiveness and the hope of reconciliation that cherishes relationships, is more open to new information, and more flexible in discovering other options. Because it is based in a conception of history that is much larger, it does not have to be convinced that markets are the key to what is really going on in the world. As a result it can recognize the contingency of capital, demystifying it, and offer new ways of starting over through Jubilee and mutual provision when debt, loss, or overaccumulation tend to distort human relations. Making use of its own sacred process for making decisions, for settling disputes and conflicts, for deliberation and discernment, a correlating conception of history allows the church to patiently persist in this receptive vulnerability as it trusts the Spirit to work through it and expects for God to show up. In the face of the closed history of capital, the church knows in Christ that history is more open to the future and because it knows this it is more hopeful to locate the way to the future in the patient politics of small achievements. Disposed in this way, the culture of the church helped to shape the work of

resistance and engagement enacted by NC United Power with a more radically democratic alternative. As it did so, the apocalyptic politics fostered in the church and extended and extrapolated in the work of congregation-based community organizing served to open new futures and to make real change.

*Capital, the End of History, and the Closure of the Future*

While capital has established its global hegemony through the homogenization of time, it legitimates and reifies its position with its own conception of history. As is the case with any empire, it is through the history it promotes and sanctions that it rationalizes its reign and privileges its dominion. By projecting itself as the eternal and natural state of things, capital presents itself as the law of past development and the engine of future promise. It is, according to this narrative, the culmination of human existence, the end of history. Presented as the system that fulfills humanity's deepest longings, the sovereignty of capital is bolstered by a theory of universal history that locates in this socio-political phenomenon the complete maturation of civilization. The homogeneous, quantified, and rectilinear time of capital I described in the last chapter, thus, is complemented by an overarching conception of history. The current configuration of time according to accumulation and exchange is accompanied by a corresponding theoretical representation of the past and the future, solidifying capital's reign in a totalizing narrative that defines it as the meaning of the past and the law of the future. In short, the global empire of late capital fabulates its own existence, legitimating itself as the culmination of the universal past and the purveyor of the future. Hence, in order to

understand the hold capital has come to claim across the globe, I want to examine the conception of history that accompanies its dominion.

The origins of this fabulation emerge with the advent of modern political theory and the notions of civil society formulated in different ways by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. It was developed further in the writings of political economists like Smith and Ricardo of the eighteenth century. But the most formidable presentation of this conception of history was provided by G.F.W. Hegel, especially as he is interpreted in the twentieth century by Russian émigré and French intellectual Alexandre Kojève. Furthered and popularized by American philosopher and political theorist Francis Fukuyama, Kojève's read of Hegel provides the theory of history necessary to legitimate and reify capital's global hegemony. As Francis Fukuyama puts it, "At the center of Kojève's teaching was the startling assertion that Hegel had been essentially right, and that world history, for all the twists and turns it had taken in subsequent years, had effectively ended in the year 1806," culminating in the "modern 'universal and homogenous state.'"<sup>3</sup> According to this understanding of history, because the core of capital resides in the innovative and revolutionary power of science to produce unrivalled technologies of military dominance and economic prosperity, it inevitably achieves supremacy. Even more, however, because economic wealth of capital brings the possibility of equity within reach, it also fulfills the deepest spiritual longing of human beings for recognition.<sup>4</sup> While politics, whether it be of monarchic, oligarchic,

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<sup>3</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 66.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii, 190.

demagogic, or finally, democratic nature, is intrinsically prone to degeneration and decline, according to this framework it is the innovative soul of capital that leads humanity forward in accumulation, growth, and development.<sup>5</sup> Maximizing the promise of scientific knowledge, capital fosters innovation and technological advancement, establishing its prominence through decisive military advantages and in the productive capacity of its economy which allows it to fulfill an increasing set of human desires. Understood from this perspective, capital appears not only as the order most conducive to military dominance and economic advance but also as the key mechanism of the fulfillment of the human desire for recognition thus comprising the fullest form of human life and the end of human progress in the achievement of a global market. Closed within the gates of the “global village,” the future lies within the triumph of the “global age.”<sup>6</sup>

Offering more of a philosophical meta-narrative, this capitalist theory of history provides the basic anthropological, ontological, and socio-political concepts that shape what counts as history. At the same time it also offers its own spiritual account of what moves history, and how this movement accords with capital innovation and creative destruction. To provide a more complete understanding of the conception of history that so captivates the cultural imagination and dominates the political will under global capital, I want to examine this theoretical account more closely.

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<sup>5</sup> While I have mention Joseph Schumpeter’s concept of creative destruction, which will continue to play a central role in the conception of capitalism and its historical development I lay out in this chapter, his work on innovation as the animating soul of capitalism is explained further in Joseph A. Schumpeter, *The Theory of Economic Development: An Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest, and the Business Cycle* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of globalization in relation to these terms, see Manuel Castells, *The Rise of Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society, Culture Vol 1*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); and Martin Albrow, *The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

To begin, however, I want to make one general point about the relation between philosophy, anthropology, science, history, and the state for Hegel. The relation of these to one another, or better the confluence of them, is derived from the Hegel's understanding dialectic ontology. As Kojève recognizes, for Hegel, dialectic is not merely a methodological tool, but it "is the very structure of concrete reality itself."<sup>7</sup> Being is the becoming of self-conscious reality, an evolutionary process that unfolds as history. Making sense of the whole in its entirety, therefore, implies taking account of the development of human consciousness and the technological advancement that allows humanity to master the world, creating a true home for himself and making the world his world.<sup>8</sup> A science of consciousness, therefore, necessarily implies understanding this development as both subjective and objective together in a dynamic and substantial totality; what Hegel refers to as Spirit. As Kojève states,

Objective reality or Spirit is therefore neither only Nature, or the non-human world independent of human reality, nor only Man, or human reality independent of the natural world. Spirit is natural-World-implying-man, or, and this is the same thing, Man-in-the-world. And just as natural objective reality is not such or such a thing taken in isolation, i.e., in abstraction from the real ties that attach it to its spatial surroundings in the present and connect it to its past and to its future, but the indissoluble whole of the natural spatio-temporal world—so too objective human reality is not so or such an "individual" taken in fictitious isolation, but the whole historical evolution of humanity, which is accomplished in the midst of the natural world.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Alexandre Kojève, "Hegel, Marx, and Christianity," trans. Hilail Gildin, *Interpretation* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1970): 21.

<sup>8</sup> Hegel was deeply influenced by Kant's definition of the Enlightenment [*die Aufklärung*] in terms of the imperative, *Sapere aude!*, to free oneself (and humanity more generally) from the "self-incurred immaturity" or tutelage [*Unmündigkeit*] of external authorities whether perceived as human or natural. See Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" in *Kant: Political Writings*, 54-60.

<sup>9</sup> Kojève, "Hegel, Marx, and Christianity," 24-5.

It is the dynamic interaction between subject and object, taken both individually and collectively, as the movement of Spirit that unfolds (or enfolds) as history. Because consciousness, as the dialectic between subject and object, is what *is* for Hegel, a complete science of the unfolding and enfolding of consciousness throughout history is only really possible when known retrospectively from its endpoint. However, this science is at the same time the pinnacle of philosophy because it also includes the self-consciousness of the development of consciousness for itself. Only at its end, then, as Hegel put it, can philosophy “lay aside the title ‘love of knowing’ and be *actual* knowing.”<sup>10</sup>

The structure of this science is, for Hegel, a phenomenology, or an appearing (*parousia*) of the Absolute understood in its totality from the end: wherein “What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational.”<sup>11</sup> Because, as noted above, the nature of concrete “*Being* (Sein) is *Becoming* (Werden),” it develops in this dialectic relation through the negation of the given and the rapprochement of subject and object through time until it reaches complete reconciliation in absolute idea or knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, because the history of consciousness is the history of collective consciousness embodied in the state, the end of history and the establishment of the absolute implies the advent of the universal and homogenous state as the incarnation of human freedom for itself.<sup>13</sup> As

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<sup>10</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1977), § 5.

<sup>11</sup> Hegel, “Preface to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*,” 20.

<sup>12</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 38.

<sup>13</sup> As Hegel famously states in the *Philosophy of Right*, § 258, “The state consists in the march of God in the world, and its basis is the power of reason actualizing itself as will.” As Avineri points out, the first part of this sentence is peculiarly enigmatic and has been translated in many different ways, most of

one scholar has noted, “Only when the social and political development of general consciousness or spirit is comprehended can the task of the self-realization and self-reconciliation of consciousness, of the twofold of spirit and nature, be completed.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, history, as the history of the state, is the unfolding of consciousness, or the unfolding of truth for itself, which can be fully understood scientifically as the phenomenology of Spirit. Such science of totality, or knowledge of truth, however, can only be provided by the philosopher, who retrospectively considers the final reconciliation of nature and subjectivity from the end. Hence, history for Hegel is not merely the occurrence of events, but it is the totality of truth made actual for itself. It goes all the way down and reaches all the way up, integrating ontology and epistemology as well as social and political existence into a solidified and complete presence and understanding of reality. With the totalizing nature of this conception of philosophy, consciousness, science, politics, and history in mind, I want to consider the narrative of this theory of history more closely to highlight its anthropological, sociological, and ontological basis.

According to Kojève, the catalyst and engine of history, for Hegel, is desire. Human history is essentially the story of desire because humans are essentially desiring

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which have contributed to seeing in Hegel “an authoritarian, if not outright totalitarian, form of government.” However, as Avineri translates the phrase, “Es ist der Gang Gottes in der Welt, dass der Staat ist,” should be read instead as, “It is the way of God in the world, that there should be [literally: is] the state.” Schlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 176-7.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Allen Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger, and the Ground of History* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 61.

beings. It is the restlessness of desire that draws humans out of their initial absorption in the objects of experience and into self-consciousness, and it is the drive of desire that fuels the primordial conflict which gives birth to history and moves it along.<sup>15</sup> At the base of human existence, therefore, and resulting from the peculiarity of human desire for recognition, is a spiritual contest for domination, a conflict to the death between master and slave.<sup>16</sup> This contest is the grounding myth of history as Hegel understands it, because it is within this prehistoric struggle that the species begins the process of reconciling themselves to the world and making it their own. Born of desire, and specifically the desire to be recognized, the process of becoming that drives and defines all of history is constituted by this search for satisfaction in a world where one is fully recognized. And because it remains an ever-present experience for humans as the species throughout the process, both individually and collectively, new epochs of history emerge from the negative actions of work and war that transform or destroy the predominant physical, socio-political, and mental structures of the earlier era. To understand history, then, is to grasp the movement of human desire, the trail of which can be seen in the development of labor and warfare. While I need not provide a complete account of all of Hegel's theory of history and consciousness, I think it will be helpful for my discussion of capital to describe the grounding myth in more detail to clarify further his anthropology and to illuminate the sociology it engenders.

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<sup>15</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 3-4.

<sup>16</sup> Referring to the spiritual quality of history, Fukuyama notes, "As interpreted by Alexandre Kojève, Hegel provides us with an alternative 'mechanism' by which to understand the historical process, one based on the 'struggle for recognition.'" *The End of History and the Last Man*, 144.



The conscious individual first comes to understand herself as an “I”, that is, the human being first comes to self-consciousness by being brought back to herself from complete absorption in the world through “reflection,” which serves to distinguish her from “the being of the world of sense and perception.”<sup>17</sup> Turning within oneself in reflection, while giving rise to a consciousness of oneself as an “I”, however, at the same time creates a distance between this “I” and the world. Thus, upon the instant of this inward gathering of oneself, the self-conscious “I” experiences a sense of loss and this lack immediately provokes a desire for reunion with the separated other, or the “non-I.” Intrinsic to one’s self-consciousness and arising at its origin is the desire to fill this lack and be reunified with the separated other, i.e., the world now estranged from the self-conscious “I”. Hence, a negative relation, the lack internal to desire itself, mediates the connection between the “I” and the estranged world. Innate to self-consciousness, to knowing oneself as a distinct and separate entity, is a desire for that which is now lacking. As Kojève puts it, “It is in and by—or better still, as—‘his’ Desire that man is formed and is revealed—to himself and to others—as an I, as the I that is essentially different from, and radically opposed to, the non-I. The (human) I is the I of a Desire or of Desire.”<sup>18</sup> At the base of Hegel’s view of history, therefore, is an anthropology of desire, a fundamental longing and lack intrinsic to the self-consciousness itself that spurs along the search for satisfaction.

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<sup>17</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §167.

<sup>18</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 4. See also, Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 175, where he states that “In the sphere of Life, which is the object of Desire, *negation* is present either *in an other*, viz in Desire, or as a *determinateness* opposed to another indifferent form, or as the inorganic universal nature of Life.”

While initially somewhat gratifying, the individual also quickly realizes that reunification with the world through consumption, Hegel believes, cannot provide stable and prolonged satisfaction. The acquisition and annihilation of inanimate objects cannot provide the fulfillment human desire seeks. Instead, what becomes quickly evident to self-consciousness is that its desire can only be fulfilled through the recognition of a similar and opposing desire. The desire one seeks is in the desiring of another. As Hegel states, "Self consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged."<sup>19</sup> The reason for this is that the form of self-certainty the "I" gains by following its desire for inanimate objects only results in the annihilation of those objects, an annihilation that serves to confirm the nothingness that is the truth of these objects. Finding itself once again in relation to nothingness, having annihilated the object, the "I" discovers that the self-certainty of consumption does not last, for as soon as the object is consumed it no longer exists outside of the "I" but has become part of it. Once the object has been destroyed and the truth of its nothingness has been certified by the "I", the "I" quickly discovers itself to be in want of another object to consume in order to realize again the certainty of its own self-consciousness. As Kojève explains, "Generally speaking, the I of Desire is an emptiness that receives real positive content only by negating action that satisfies Desire in destroying, transforming, and 'assimilating' the desired non-I." What occurs in this movement is that "The I created by the active satisfaction of such a Desire will have the

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<sup>19</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 178.

same nature as the things toward which that Desire is directed.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, if the desire of the “I” is merely directed at obtaining, consuming and possessing objects that are not self-conscious, then it will never itself rise to the level of true self-consciousness but will remain caught within a mode of animal existence, living according to only its immediate inclinations. What marks the human species as distinctive is the pursuit of satisfaction in the fulfillment of self-conscious desire by being acknowledged by the desire of another self-conscious being. As self-conscious beings, humans desire one thing in particular: to know oneself as desired desire. Human interaction and relations are, by this account, woven of the cord of the intrinsic yearning for recognition, a drive aimed to domination.

The desire for recognition as the drive that lies at the base of human interactions initiates conflict between individuals, a conflict that stands at the very foundation of human existence. In that “Recognition can only come from an ‘other’ whom one takes to be a self-conscious agent (an agent who has a point of view on the world and therefore his own practical projects), and who *confers* that recognition on one, [e]ach therefore makes a conflicting demand on the other. ...[And] the result of this would at first be a struggle to the death.”<sup>21</sup> Each seeking to secure his own domination over a like being and to gain the recognition of this other, a fight to the death ensues, pitting them against one another in a clash for prestige. As Hegel asseverates, “They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being *for themselves* to truth, ...[for] the individual

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<sup>20</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 57. Fukuyama, following Kojève, also notes, “Man is a fundamentally other-directed and social animal, but his sociability leads him not into peaceful civil society, but into a violent struggle to the death for pure prestige.” *The End of History and the Last Man*, 147.

who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a *person*, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness.”<sup>22</sup> A solution to this conflict can only be reached when one of the combatants chooses life over obtaining the recognition of the other and, in doing so, opts to take the other one’s point of view, becoming subject to their self-interest and desire. From this conflict, a master and a slave emerge. “The one who opts for life becomes the slave, the other becomes the master.”<sup>23</sup>

Far from ending here, the prehistoric contest between the master and the slave is only the beginning of the story; it is merely the origin of social life as the two, along with other slaves acquired by this master, are now bound dialectically within the overriding self-interest of the master. The structure of this dialectical relationship may not be at first apparent, but it is within this relationship that Hegel understands the other crucial catalyst of history, labor, to emerge. Given that the slave’s life has been procured only through the destruction of his own desires in his willing subjection to the master such that he has now taken the point of view of the master and, as a result, has acquiesced to the master’s projects, the slave must now participate in the master’s attempt to construct the world according to his desire. The slave is put to work by the master whose desire he is now forced to serve. He is forced to prepare the world for the master’s consumption. However, while the slave stands in a subservient relationship to the master and serves his

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<sup>22</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 187. Fukuyama argues for the superiority of Hegel’s account of the state of nature over the mechanistic view of Hobbes, noting that for Hegel, “by risking his life, man proves that he can act contrary to his most powerful and basic instinct, the instinct for self-preservation.” *The End of History and the Last Man*, 150. Indeed, for Hegel, humanity is spiritual because “Only man is capable of engaging in a bloody battle for the sole purpose of demonstrating that he has contempt for his own life, that he is something more than a complicated machine or a ‘slave to his passions,’ in short, that he has a specifically human dignity because he is free” (151). In Hobbes’ account, “Leviathon does not satisfy that pride, but subdues it” (157).

<sup>23</sup> Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology*, 59.

master's desire to dominate the world, in dialectical fashion the master is seen to be completely dependent upon the slave, "who stands between the master and the alien world, transforming it through work into a form appropriate for immediate consumption."<sup>24</sup> Mutual, though dissimilar, dependence characterizes their relation to one another, as the slave works to fulfill the master's desire and the master relies upon the slave to transform the objects of the world into the things that he desires. The slave's labor as a result mediates the world to the master, and it is through the negating activity, or work, of this mediation that the initial stage of history really begins.<sup>25</sup>

For Hegel, as the slave works in the service of his master, out of this subjection a new dialectical progression emerges; "servitude in its consummation will really turn into the opposite of what it immediately is."<sup>26</sup> In his immediate experience the slave does not know himself as a being-for-self, but merely as a being-for-the-master. This is most immediately expressed in his working for the master and the shaping of the world according to the master's desire. However, as the slave works upon the world, he soon comes to find that through his toil he establishes a unity with the world he could not have known before. While working on the world for the master, coincidentally, the slave

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<sup>24</sup> Gillespie, "Death and Desire: War and Bourgeoisification in the Thought of Hegel," in *Understanding the Political Spirit: Philosophical Investigations from Socrates to Nietzsche*, ed. Catherine H. Zuchert (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 160.

<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note here that for all intents and purposes Hegel does not see much potential in the life of the master, though he continues to persist in the figure of the state, or the warrior class. For the most part the master is completely left behind in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* as Hegel turns his attention to the concept of history that will emerge from the slave's labor. He states in commenting on the life of the master that "what now really confronts him [the master] is not an independent consciousness, but a dependent one. He is, therefore, not certain of being-for-self as the truth of himself. On the contrary, his truth is in reality the unessential consciousness and its unessential action" (§ 192). To think by this, however, that the master does not continue to exist and to set the conditions for the history of the slave is in my mind to misread the role of the state in Hegel's philosophy.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, § 193.

realizes that “through his service he rids himself of his attachment to natural existence in every single detail; and gets rid of it by working on it.” He realizes that he need not consume the world immediately, but can discipline his desire and, in so doing, create lasting impressions in the world. “Through work,” Hegel states, “...the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is.”<sup>27</sup> By working on the world, by shaping and forming the world, the slave, oddly enough, rises above animal existence and comes into his own.

Labor opens up a new mode of existence for the slave, one that allows the slave to move beyond desire’s natural and initial dependence on objects. While the master, on the one hand, continues to consume and destroy objects, as is consistent with his desire to attain unity with them, and in doing so never rises above natural existence, the slave’s “work, on the other hand, is desire held in check, fleetingness staved off” as it forms and shapes things.<sup>28</sup> As the slave works upon the world, he quickly realizes that by *not* consuming the object immediately he is able to unite himself to it and give it his form. He shapes, molds and transforms the object, imbuing it with himself. Instead of attempting to overcome his sense of alienation from the world through immediate consumption, the slave discovers in labor that he is able to put himself into an object, joining it to himself without annihilating it. Implanting his image in the object through work, a whole new

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., § 194, 195. Fukuyama observes that while originally driven to work on the world out of fear of death according to the master’s wishes, “the motive for [the slave’s] labor eventually changes. Instead of working for fear of immediate punishment, he begins to do it out of a sense of duty and self-discipline, in the course of which he learns to suppress his animal desires for the sake of work.” In this respect, the spiritual nature of the slave is reborn in and through her labor. *The End of History and the Last Man*, 194.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., § 195. See also Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. John Viertel (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1974), where he makes the same point. He writes, “labor breaks the dictates of immediate desires and, as it were, arrests the process of drive satisfaction” (154).

level of existence arises for the slave, one not determined by destructive consumption but by unity created with the world through the constructive negating activity of work.

Not only does the slave transform the world by working on it, but, conversely, he also learns through this act of work by receiving the world into himself. In this way, the slave really does become one with the world. Elaborating on Hegel's point, Kojève notes, "In his work, he trans-forms things and trans-forms himself at the same time: he forms things and the world by transforming himself, by educating himself; and he educates himself, he forms himself, by transforming things and the world."<sup>29</sup> Alienation from the world is thus overcome, as the slave, through his labor, becomes one with the object of his toil, making him one with the world. In this process history is born because it is through labor that the slave begins to write his story (and the story of humanity in general) into the world. Whereas "idle Mastery is an impasse, laborious slavery, in contrast, is the source of all human, social, historical progress. History is the history of the working slave."<sup>30</sup> Through work, according to Hegel, the species actualizes its intentions and ideas as it refashions objects and, in turn, it is also reshaped by the education received from working on it. Thus, through the production and transformation of the objects of his labor, the slave is able to create a new world, his own world.<sup>31</sup> His is now a historical world wherein the intentions of the individual are actualized and persist.

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<sup>29</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 25.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 20. Ernst Bloch also makes this point with regard to seeing the worker as the basis of Marxism. He notes, "...the Archimedean point for history, is—from the viewpoint of Marxism—the working man." Ernst Bloch, *On Karl Marx*, trans. John Maxwell (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 104.

<sup>31</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 90. Also see 52-53, where he states, "Work is *Bildung*, in the double meaning of the word; on the one hand, it forms, transforms the World, humanizes it

Rising above his original animal nature through work, joining himself to the world, the working slave begins to see his own existence in the world, generating an objective history that is aimed toward “the non-biological end of Recognition.”<sup>32</sup> In his work he also develops technologies that allow him to produce and reproduce the products of his work with more skill, precision, and efficiency. Through the organization of these products into which the worker has put himself and the technologies employed to produce them, the historical process of this working on the world brings into actuality “a concrete universal”, a state or politic constituted of this collective productivity.<sup>33</sup> In Kojève’s reading of Hegel, this state brokers the relations of recognition, ordering them and insuring them (though always ultimately in relation to the dominant ruler/master). And a succession of states, coincides with the unfolding of the universal history of humankind. Evolving from despotism, the Greek city-state, the Roman Empire, and the Teutonic folk, the universal history located in the existence of the working slave is raised (raises itself) to the level of the modern state, whose form is equity and mutual recognition in property.<sup>34</sup> As Fukuyama argues following Kojève, this is the process of

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by making it more adapted to Man; on the other, it transforms, forms, educates man, it humanizes him by bringing him into greater conformity with the *Idea* that he has of himself, an idea that—in the beginning—is only an *abstract* idea, an *ideal*... This creative education of Man by work (*Bildung*) creates History—i.e. human *Time*. Work *is* Time, and that is why it necessarily exists *in* time; it requires time.”

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>33</sup> See Shadia B. Drury, *Alexandre Kojève: The Roots of Postmodern Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 38, wherein she notes that, “[Kojève] thinks the slave accomplishes much more –he accomplishes what the master could not. In the course of the historical process, the slave manages to gain recognition of his *Sein*, his biological being, his particularity. Through his work and struggle, he manages to bring into being a state—a concrete universal—that is willing to recognize his particularity as a thing of absolute value.”

<sup>34</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, § 341-60.



modernization.<sup>35</sup> With the eclipse of the master class (the aristocrats, the monarchs, the tyrants) emerges the new socio-political character of the bourgeois citizen. The process of development connected to the work and struggle of the slave for liberation, also enacts a transformation of the state wherein the subjective advance of the slave is reconciled to the objective existence of the state. As Kojève puts it, the slave commences upon “the progressive negation of Slavery” through a series of “successive ‘conversions’ to Freedom (which, however, will not be the ‘identical’ or ‘thetical’ freedom of the Master, who is free only *in himself*, but the ‘total’ or ‘synthetical’ freedom, which also exists *for itself*, of the Citizen of the universal and homogeneous State).”<sup>36</sup> In other words, while the process of history progresses via the negating actions of war and work, throughout this process the slave is slowly raised as a collective whole to the level of mutual recognition and self-rule in a state of equity, converging the existence of the slave and the master in the newly self-conscious objective freedom of the modern state.

The integration of the master and the slave is achieved with the advent of the modern citizen (*citoyen*), a figure in whom this convergence is achieved through universal conscription and the establishment of private property. In one respect, then, the formation of the citizen is established by the collective association of masters (the elite warriors) in a state in contest against a mutual enemy, where each recognizes the other as a warrior in battle. In yet another respect, however, the work of the slave, and her communication with other slaves in doing so, gives birth to the sciences whose ideals

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<sup>35</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 184-90.

<sup>36</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 225.

appear in art and religion and whose products slowly begin to take the mark of property within a culture of mutual respect and corporate objectives. Thus, as Kojève neatly summarizes his thought,

On the one hand, each Master seeks to be recognized by *all* men. And so the ‘State’ of which he is a citizen is essentially warlike and aspires to universal empire. On the other hand, the slave does not content himself endlessly with the imaginary satisfactions that art and the religions beyond give him. He tries to make his masters recognize him. He therefore seeks to suppress them as masters. And that is why states in which there are slaves of any kind whatever (that is to say, ‘classes’) are the arena of bloody fights which have as their goal the establishment of social *homogeneity*. History is therefore a more or less uninterrupted sequence of foreign wars and bloody revolutions. But this sequence has an aim, and consequently an end. For being born of the desire for recognition, history will necessarily stop at the moment at which this desire will be fully satisfied. Now this desire will be fully satisfied when each will be recognized in his reality and in his human dignity by *all* the others, these others being recognized by each in their reality and dignity ((a reality and dignity which are recognized as being)) equal to his own. In other words, history will stop when man will be perfectly satisfied by the fact of being a recognized citizen of a *universal and homogeneous* State, or, if you prefer, of a classless society comprising the whole of humanity.<sup>37</sup>

The classless, i.e., fully satisfied, human community that stands at the end of history appears with the arrival of “the *Bourgeois*, the private property owner” who emerges as the citizen soldier in the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>38</sup> In the figure of the bourgeois, the opposition of the master and the slave is overcome (*aufheben*), and perfect satisfaction is achieved in

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<sup>37</sup> Kojève, “Hegel, Marx and Christianity,” 33-34. As summarized by Shadia Drury, “[History] ends only when that satisfaction is finally achieved on every level – the economic, the psychological, and the political. *Economically* speaking, history ends with capitalism; the latter facilitates man’s conquest over nature and inaugurates a world of global prosperity. *Politically* speaking, history ends in a universal, homogeneous state – a state that is universal in the sense that it encompasses the globe, and homogeneous in the sense that it is a classless society or a society without class structures, without masters or slaves... *Philosophically* speaking, history ends with absolute knowledge... *Psychologically* speaking, history ends when man accepts his own mortality and lives authentically in the face of death. History ends with atheism.” Drury, *Alexandre Kojève*, 41-2.

<sup>38</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 63, 44.

that this citizen is both willing to risk his life in war as a representative of the universal and seen in his particularity in the property he holds. He has finally, in this state, ascertained the full desire for desire in the form of complete, mutual recognition (*Anerkennung*).<sup>39</sup> The end of liberative revolution and scientific advancement, the capitalist state emerges as the mature and final goal of history.

Key to this capitalist state is the role of advanced technology, which as Fukuyama observes, establishes “the high degree of correlation between advanced industrialization and liberal democracy.”<sup>40</sup> It is growth of technology that facilitates the possibility for mutual recognition in economic accumulation as well as the decisive military advantage that forces other states and peoples across the globe to conform to this way of life. By greatly increasing economic production, technology on the one hand facilitates the “tremendously homogenizing power” of market expansion in the “creation of a universal consumer culture.”<sup>41</sup> As a result, the possibility for mutual recognition in property and economic wealth is broadened, as these become more accessible to a growing middle class. On the other hand, “Modern natural science confers a decisive military advantage on those societies that can develop, produce, and deploy technology most effectively, and

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<sup>39</sup> As an interesting note here, Kojève, while deeply indebted to Marx in several ways, drew the conclusion that Marx’s critique of political economy had been completely overcome by developments within capitalism itself. In 1980, for instance, an essay published posthumously, and which Kojève had originally delivered as a paper in Dusseldorf, Germany on January 16, 1957, appeared in the French periodical *Commentaire*. In it he argues that the developments of Henry Ford effected a transformation in capitalism such that he was able to render a reconciliation between Marxism and capitalism through his alterations in pay and in his innovations that made the Ford the emblem of mass production for the whole of the population. Alexandre Kojève, “Capitalisme et socialisme: Marx est Dieu, Ford est son prophète,” *Commentaire* 9 (Spring 1980): 135-37. As will become more explicit below, his thesis in this essay along with his view of the end of history is the unacknowledged starting point for much of postmodern political theory and philosophy.

<sup>40</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 205.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

the relative advantage conferred by technology increases as the rate of technological change accelerates.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, while the development of technology provides humanity with greater control over nature, those countries that are technologically more advanced also have a military advantage over other societies with which they compete and contest. Because of technology, in short, not only do these societies naturally develop the economic conditions necessary to satisfy the spiritual quest for recognition in the equity of property and the limitless consumption made possible by mass production, but they also achieve the military supremacy necessary to ensure the expansion of their way of life across the globe and over any contending civilizations.

In the equity made possible by technological advance, the individual also finds a liberated political standing, an objective freedom, in the spiritual existence of mutual recognition. “He is the Citizen (Bürger) of the State formed by those who recognize him and who he recognizes in turn.”<sup>43</sup> He becomes a “*legal reality*,” enjoying the publicly acknowledged right of possession in the things he owns and the products he consumes, a right recognized by the collective whole and granted to him by the overriding ethos of the community.<sup>44</sup> In the public recognition of his property, he is also recognized as the individual with rights even as he recognizes the rights of others. Thus, the shared recognition of property is the foundation for the equality actualized in liberal democracy, as the substantial form of a fully satisfied and complete human existence. Accordingly,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>43</sup> Kojève, “Hegel, Marx, and Christianity,” 32.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. “Kojève believed,” Fukuyama writes, “that modern liberal democracy successfully synthesized the morality of the master and the morality of the slave, overcoming the distinction between them even as it preserves something of both forms of existence.” *The End of History and the Last Man*, 207.

with the appearance of the bourgeois citizen is at the same time the condition for the realization of human spirit in history, as the moment wherein the mastery of nature converges with the satisfaction of the thymotic drive. “For Hegel...liberal society is a reciprocal and equal agreement among citizens to mutually recognize each other...Life in a liberal democracy is potentially the road to great material abundance, but it also shows us the way to the completely non-material end of recognition of our freedom.”<sup>45</sup> Satisfaction is achieved: dignity and pride (*thymos*) are fulfilled in property while the promise of limitless accumulation and consumption offer ways of mitigating megalomania (*megalothymia*) and democratic representation guarantees the place of one’s voice (*isothymia*) in the politic.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, national identity continues to maintain a strong affiliation with the military. Liberal democracy objectively offers the fulfillment of human desire with the innovative spirit of capitalism as the trajectory of the realization of this ideal; bourgeois life evidences the end of history. Based as it is upon modern science, the key to history from this perspective is innovative and entrepreneurial nature of human desire made rational and most fully realized and acknowledged in capitalism. Propelled by the engine of creative destruction, capital comes into its own at the end of modernity, establishing itself as an incessant process of renewal, liberation, and satisfaction and reifying its order and cosmology of limitless accumulation.<sup>47</sup> History is

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<sup>45</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 200.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 183, 187, 89-97.

<sup>47</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, 82-3. Fukuyama emphasizes what he sees as the strong correlation between natural science and capitalism by stating, “Science as a social phenomenon unfolds not simply because men are curious about the universe, but because science permits them to gratify their desire for security, and for the limitless acquisition of material goods.” Together, they provide directionality to history and to human development. *The End of History and the Last Man*, 80.

rendered accordingly, its end achieved with global capital and the future guaranteed to be more of the same.

Capitalism, cloaked in the garb of a liberal democracy grounded in rights and property, is the actualization of the end of history; it is what the future will be. As Fukuyama puts it, “Indeed, the growth of liberal democracy, together with its companion, economic liberalism, has been the most remarkable macropolitical phenomenon of the last four hundred years.” The triumph of liberal democratic, capitalist order across the globe, furthermore, manifests “a fundamental process at work that dictates a common evolutionary pattern for *all* human societies—in short, something like a Universal History of mankind in the direction of liberal democracy.”<sup>48</sup> Free of contradictions, reconciled and satisfied, as the end of history it continues to extend its reach, integrating peoples into the global community of liberal coalitions and market systems.<sup>49</sup> As the end of history, it discloses the meaning of human existence, providing a “transhistorical standard” that presents its own complete account of humanity and the essence of history.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, by offering a conception of history, the end of which is realized in the liberal democratic societies of late capitalism, it reifies this way of life with an ethos of how life ought to be lived. According to this meta-narrative, no idea of society, of humanity, or of human government surpasses the liberal market-state ethically,

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<sup>48</sup> Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 48.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 275. Fukuyama, however, does note that while the general trajectory is toward universal market integration, “we will not get beyond the nation-state any time soon as the fundamental source of legitimate democratic authority” (351). As I argued in chapter four with my discussion of the market-state, Fukuyama’s assumption about the future of the nation-state may need to be revised.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 288.

philosophically, or in its claim to legitimacy.<sup>51</sup> Capital, on this account, is humanity completely come of age. It is the meaning of the past, the order of the present, and will be the truest form of existence in the future: the eternal actualized in time.<sup>52</sup>

The *parousia* of the end of history and the reign of the empire of global capitalism announces the eclipse of humanity's search for meaning, instilling the notion that the way of consumption, enterprise, and economization are not simply a contingent reality of modern life but indeed the very way human life ought to be lived and the order of the cosmos. A concept of history consistent with the dominion of capital solidifies its order by privileging negative freedom for its subjects over any larger or higher goals and thereby also reifies its social relations and political processes as the way things ought to work.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, it sees in entrepreneurship and consumption as the fundamental activities of citizenship, while presuming that more often than not markets produce the best possible outcomes. The conclusion, therefore, viewed from this narrative and

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>52</sup> For Hegel, Kojève, and Fukuyama there is also a downside to the end of history. For Hegel, life at the end of history is not beautiful, but, as made more explicit by Max Weber, boring due to the fact that the bureaucrat replaces the hero warrior. For Kojève, life at the end of history is characterized by snobbery as a substitute for more risky adventures of the extinct master class. And for Fukuyama, the arena of business at this end point will increasingly tend to capture those individuals seeking to have their superiority to others recognized. Ibid., 320.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 160. To be fair to Fukuyama, he does note the fact that capitalism can pose a threat to democracy, even as he does not seem to foresee the degree to which the market-state coopts democratic rhetoric and methods integrating them into the hegemony of finance and global capital. He rightly observes, "The possibility of strong community life is...attacked by the pressures of the capitalist marketplace. Liberal economic principles provide no support for traditional communities; quite the contrary, they tend to atomize and separate people" (325). But what is clear here is that Fukuyama reads his own narrative of struggle as a means of reverse causation back into and over all forms of collective life and communal relations. As a result, he continues, "This suggests that no fundamental strengthening of community life will be possible unless individuals give back certain of their rights to communities, and accept the return of historical forms of intolerance" (326). It is clear he lacks any concept of a truly alternative kind of community, one ordered by forgiveness and the possibility of reconciliation actualized within a real social process.

reifying its own sense of significance and the necessity of its order of relations, Fukuyama states,

History was not a blind concatenation of events, but a meaningful whole in which human ideas concerning the nature of a just political and social order developed and played themselves out. And if we are now at a point where we cannot imagine a world substantially different from our own, in which there is no apparent or obvious way in which the future will represent a fundamental improvement over our current order, then we must also take into consideration the possibility that History itself might be at an end.<sup>54</sup>

A spiritual and material narrative, this concept of history rationalizes the reign of capital, establishing its claim on the future as the substantial and eternal order that structures human life according to its definition of human essence.

I have taken the time to explicate the conception of history articulated by Hegel, Kojève, and Fukuyama in order to make evident the spiritual, that is, ontological, anthropological, and political meta-narrative that solidifies and reifies capital's dominion and its hold over the future. Critical to this analysis was the place of negating action first in fighting, then in work, and finally in creative destruction that lies at the heart of capital's self-legitimation. As the engine of history, the essence of human creativity, and the path of its liberation, this fundamental process of capitalism operates on a global scale to capture and reproduce human social relations and political arrangements within a universal form of existence and a homogenized imagination. Locked within a conception of history determined by capital, it is no surprise that people do not know how to embody a different future. As a result, they tend to try to adjust to the tragedy of late, capitalist

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 51.



life, assuming that their losses are inevitable and that market forces must play out. Mounting debt and foreclosure are necessary outcomes from time to time for a game in which there are winners and losers. While these realities are acknowledged by capital's proponents as regrettable on some level, the general satisfaction provided by the system and its controlled outlets for competition, entrepreneurship, creative destruction, accumulation, and individual recognition are considered to be unsurpassable.

The future is in the market and all particulars only have meaning or political purchase insofar as they connect to this universal and general process of innovation, growth, and development. Hence, to resist and challenge capital and the way of life configured by its process of creative destruction in the aim of accumulation, exchange, and expansion, an alternative conception of history or what the theologian David Toole has called "a counterhistory that deconstructs the 'self-evident picture of how things are'" is necessary.<sup>55</sup> Taking the time to attend to particulars that would otherwise be absorbed and overtaken by universal and absolute agendas, a different mode of politics, one more patient, relational, personal and radically democratic, is needed to discern new futures. A theologically attuned process for how to move forward situated within a larger sense of what is going on in the world can provide support for a countervailing political engagement able to challenge capital's hold over the future by imagining and moving toward other options. A sense of history able to see the liberative activity of God at work in the small, the particular, and the ordinary is needed to challenge a future determined by the broad and destructive program of global capital to open more extraordinary futures

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<sup>55</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 212.

characterized by forgiveness, reconciliation, and the possibility of new beginnings. As I will show, it is just such an alternative conception of history derived from the distinct experience and representation of time embodied in the church's process of binding and loosing that infused NC United Power's campaign with the hope of a new future. It is to the work of this campaign and its vision of how to go forward in forgiveness, modification, and mutual provision that I now turn.

### *Organizing to Open a New Future*

In line with the conception of history I have just provided, when the economic crisis hit officials and the financial industry suggested that the only way to go forward was simply to let the process of creative destruction run its course. Along these lines the banks made use of broad and universal strategies to deal with the housing crisis. All struggling homeowners and distressed households were the same and were to be treated in like manner. Of course, as I have duly noted, the implication of this universal approach was that each and every one of these households was to be indiscriminately subjected to the process of accumulation by dispossession. Ensuring a smooth process, the banks' general agenda of maximizing profit was privileged, allowing them to operate unimpeded and unchecked while they and their investment partners relied upon the government bailout to stabilize their institutions and actually improve their position. Pitched as the inevitable process of market correction, of reconfiguration and adjustment, on the ground the destruction of millions of peoples' lives and livelihoods was occurring while banks quickly returned to record profits and their executives received record bonuses.

The dynamic motor driving this volatile redistribution was the same motor that continually devastates and renews capitalist societies in the interest of accumulation. But for those caught on the destructive side of this force, while the future certainly portended more of capitalism, it was also a future that looked increasingly headed to devastation and loss. To offer a new way forward and to open a new future, required a different process and a different understanding of history. By working to resist and challenge the process determined by capital's elites in response to the housing bust, NC United Power not only disrupted and decelerated this process by enacting a practice of *contretemps* derived from the sacred process of deliberation and discernment at home in the church, but it also sought new ways forward in connection to the alternative conception of history present in these apocalyptic communities, relying on the possibility of forgiveness, modification, and mutual provision. In doing so, it provided hope and helped to open a new future.

I have already shown in my account of the work of NC United Power that, while the campaign against usury and foreclosure was not a resounding and complete success, it did enjoy some small but significant victories. I want to revisit some of these victories below, not to trumpet NC United Power's campaign as having accomplished more than it did, but to highlight how it continues to pursue and to make possible new futures by relying on a different conception of history derived from the apocalyptic orientation of the church to engage in the work of radical democracy and to make change. My goal is to recount some particular stories within the campaign, particularly around foreclosure, in order to illustrate, if only in a small way, how new futures were made possible for

individuals and families trapped in the hopelessness of mounting debt and unemployment and facing the devastation of foreclosure and financial ruin through forgiveness and modification. While these may not seem like much considering the size and breadth of the economic crisis, the small achievements of this political effort did accomplish real, significant change for those trapped in foreclosure.

By looking at the impact of the victory won for military families which brought the banks to willingly conform to the guidelines of the Servicemember's Civil Relief Act (SCRA) and the negotiations with Bank of America and the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) to modify home loans, I will describe how the alternative process of resolution based in a qualitatively distinct time of the church also offered an alternative way to move forward correlated to a different conception of history, allowing these individuals and families to persist in hope while facing stark circumstances. As those active in and served by the collective campaign, they discovered that an alternative mode of political judgment could imbue them with a will-of-hope to discover alternative ways forward through forgiveness, reconciliation, and the mutual provision of justice. Instead of operating from the top down where most pundits and observers are trained to see the impact of political efforts, the radically democratic work of NC United Power moved from bottom up, finding ways to break particular cases free from the universal procedures being employed by the banks and to personalize them. In doing so, as I will show in the last section of this chapter, their political activity was guided by an apocalyptic sense of history that allowed them to take the time to listen, to build relationships, to dialogue and attend to the particulars of personal situations and

circumstances, and ultimately to discover alternative routes forward in specific instances. What may have appeared to be futile, inconsequential, or irrelevant effort accomplished more than most outside observers would have thought possible.

When the market collapsed in 2007 the optimism surrounding the “new economy” for millions of Americans also came crashing down. The sense that things would continue to get better, was replaced with the reality of unemployment, depreciating home values, adjusting interest rates, and economic ruin. It goes without saying that for those laden with mounting debt, struggling to find a job, and facing the inevitability of foreclosure the future did not appear promising. Their lives seemed trapped within a history on the brink of loss, failure, isolation, and ruin. Hopeless, exhausted, embarrassed, and scared, those facing foreclosure and attempting to navigate the proceedings saw no way out, further disheartened and frustrated by bank strategies set up to deny modification. Commenting on her experience, Jenny Barker, one of the women facing foreclosure I introduced earlier, stated, “If I really sat down and let myself absorb everything that’s going on... I’m not sure I could get through the day.”<sup>56</sup> Others in the same position were overwhelmed by anxiety and stress, a situation exacerbated by bank practices. Pestered by what he described as bank “terror calls,” Rev. Patrick Lattimore a minister in Greensboro, NC, stated, that the individuals he was working with to avoid foreclosure and to get modification often displayed a “siege mentality,” fatigued, panic-stricken, and despondent as a result of the constant “fear speak” directed at them by bank

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<sup>56</sup> NC United Power and the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, “A Call to Arms: Homeowners Fighting Back Against Foreclosure,” written and directed by Joy Ogunmuyiwa (2012), videorecording, available at: <http://www.ncunitedpower.org/issue-campaigns/get-informed/facing-foreclosure/>

representatives. The threat of losing their home constantly looming, Kelli Brown another one of the 19,256 NC homeowners in foreclosure in 2012, reflected on her and her husband Jerome's experience saying, "[It's a time] when you think you can't put one foot in front of the other."<sup>57</sup> For these people, like millions of others around the nation, there seemed to be no way to go forward. With over half the nation living pay check to pay check and 43 percent spending more than they earn each year prior to the 2007-08 crisis,<sup>58</sup> the creative motor of capitalism on the back side of the housing bubble bust turned out for millions to be a destructive trap, directing them with a future of homelessness and economic devastation. "[It's] just more than a human being should have to endure," concluded Kelli Brown.

Among those hounded by foreclosure and debt were active-duty military personnel, those returning from service, and veterans. While on active duty, a 2010 survey of service members reported that 36 percent were having trouble keeping up with their expenses, 25 percent had fallen into overdraft, and about 10 percent had fallen behind on their mortgages.<sup>59</sup> Returning veterans and those already home faced even tougher challenges with 27 percent indicating in a survey that re-entry was difficult for them, a number that ballooned to 44 percent for those returning from the wars since

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<sup>57</sup> Brown's comments here and below are reported in Paul Clark, "Facing foreclosure, homeowners look for stopgaps," Carolina Public Press, May 30, 2012, available at: <http://www.carolinapublicpress.org/9701/facing-foreclosure-wnc-homeowners-search-for-stopgap-help>

<sup>58</sup> These statistics are reported by NeighborWorks America, "Foreclosure Statistics," and based on The MetLife Study of Employee Benefit Trends: Findings from the 2003 National Survey of Employers and Employees, November 2003, and the Homeownership Preservation Foundation data of 60,000 homeowners. The fact sheet is available at: [http://www.fdic.gov/about/comein/files/foreclosure\\_statistics.pdf](http://www.fdic.gov/about/comein/files/foreclosure_statistics.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> FINRA Investor Education Foundation, "Financial Capability in the United States: Military Survey—Executive Summary," October 8, 2010, available at: <http://www.finrafoundation.org/web/groups/foundation/@foundation/documents/foundation/p122257.pdf>

terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.<sup>60</sup> In 2010, there were nearly 145,000 homeless veterans comprising 16 percent of the homeless population at any given time.<sup>61</sup> Unemployment, while peaking for veterans at over 12 percent in 2011, still hovered above the national rate at nearly 11 percent in 2012, despite the large number of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan on disability.<sup>62</sup> Commenting on the many difficulties that veterans face as they return home to a state assembly of NC United Power, Everett Martin, a formerly homeless and disabled Iraqi Freedom veteran said, “many of us continue to face unemployment, homelessness, critical health problems, and an increasingly high rate of suicide.” Furthermore, he noted, veterans are also hampered by the fact that many of the laws set up to protect them from debtors and creditors or the procedures created to help them get their benefits “include a lot of bureaucratic red tape that is frustrating and oftentimes takes years to sort through.” Corroborating Martin’s thoughts, Ciat Shabazz, the director of the HARRY Veteran Community Services organization based in Winston-Salem and through which Martin had become active in NC United Power, relayed that many of the veterans she sees fill overwhelmed by the challenges they confront upon return. From Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, to physical disability, to high unemployment, the troubles they face, she noted, were compounded by

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<sup>60</sup> Rich Morin and the Pew Research Center, “The Difficult Transition from Military to Civilian Life,” Social & Demographic Trends, December 8, 2011, available at: <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/12/08/the-difficult-transition-from-military-to-civilian-life/>

<sup>61</sup> Libby Perl and the Congressional Research Service, “Veterans and Homelessness,” Report for Congress, February 4, 2013, available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL34024.pdf>. Full year estimates for 2011 and 2012, this report relays, have not yet been released by HUD. While it does appear that the number of homeless veterans may be slightly lower, they are still well overrepresented in the homeless population.

<sup>62</sup> “Veterans Face Elevated Unemployment Rates,” *Wall Street Journal*, Real Time Economics, March 20, 2013 available at: <http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2013/03/20/veterans-face-elevated-unemployment-rates/>

interest rates and aggressive foreclosure proceedings. A *USA Today* report found that in 2010 more than 20,000 veterans, active-duty and reserve troops lost their homes, even as some of these individuals and families were supposed to have special protection under SCRA guidelines and because their loans are backed by the government's Veteran Affairs program.<sup>63</sup> For a disproportionate number of veterans, like Martin, the struggle to break a common cycle of debt, dispossession, and loss against forces pulling them toward these was a persistent and everyday occurrence.

As its first real victory in its work on the economy, NC United Power was able to get some relief for a segment of these military households. Resulting from their work, Bank of America announced in a press release on March 10, 2011 that it was introducing new programs “[i]mproving key benefits for those on active duty and extending mortgage protections for service members beyond active duty.” These new programs would include a “principal forgiveness loan modification program for military borrowers behind on their payments when leaving duty; a reduced 4-percent interest rate on mortgages for customers who are eligible for Service members Civil Relief Act (SCRA) protection; and a mortgage customer service unit dedicated to servicing military customers.”<sup>64</sup> As mentioned in chapter three, in an unforeseeable turn of events, Bank of America CEO Brian Moynihan acknowledged NC United Power's role in securing this resolution, even mentioning Gerald Taylor by name, in his address to the NAAG gathering at the Westin

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<sup>63</sup> Gregg Zoroya, “20,000 military members, vets faced foreclosure in 2010,” *USA Today*, February 4, 2011, available at: [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/military/2011-02-04-1Avetforeclosures04\\_ST\\_N.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/military/2011-02-04-1Avetforeclosures04_ST_N.htm)

<sup>64</sup> Bank of America, “Bank of America Introduces Program to Extend Mortgage Protections for Service members Beyond Active Duty,” press release, March 10, 2011.



Hotel in Charlotte, NC on April 12, 2011. At this time representatives of NC United Power were also able to meet with Moynihan, who thanked them personally in a face-to-face meeting for their help and committed to further discussions around the issues their people were facing. Bank of America eventually agreed to pay \$20 million in compensation to service members who were illegally foreclosed on. As part of the deal eventually reached with the Department of Justice and NAAG, BAC Home Loans Servicing LP (a subsidiary of Bank of America Corporation) would offer “servicemembers whose homes were unlawfully foreclosed on... a minimum payment of \$116,785 plus compensation for any equity lost.”<sup>65</sup> Other banks would soon follow suit, committing to a similar agreement with the Justice Department.<sup>66</sup> While a limited victory for NC United Power, the over 700 active-duty military families that had their homes illegally seized by banks during the crisis would be in line to be compensated.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, for the thousands of families that could face the same daunting future, or were wrestling with increasing interest rates and falling behind on their mortgage while serving on active-duty, the victory to have SCRA recognized by banks offered an alternative way forward. Opening up a new future for some of these households through forgiveness, loan modification, or restitution, this victory, while limited, was able to offer resolution for those trapped by debt and home loss. In the

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<sup>65</sup> Department of Justice, “Department of Justice Announces Compensation for Servicemembers as Part of Settlement with Bank of America,” press release, November 10, 2011, available at: <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2011/November/11-ag-1487.html>

<sup>66</sup> Department of Justice, “Department of Justice Reaches Agreement to Compensate Servicemembers for Wrongful Foreclosures,” press release, February 9, 2012, available at: <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2012/February/12-crt-191.html>

<sup>67</sup> “Banks Find More Wrongful Foreclosures Among Military Members,” *New York Times*, Dealbook Section, March 3, 2013, available at: <http://dealbook.nytimes.com/2013/03/03/banks-find-more-wrongful-foreclosures-among-military-members/>

process, NC United Power provided a sense of hope to these military personnel and veterans, a hope that the organization would continue to try to build on as I will describe in the conclusion of this chapter.

The second victory of the campaign was the settlement eventually reached between NAAG and the banks, allocating \$25 billion for compensation to homeowners having been unduly foreclosed on, refinancing underwater mortgages, and principal reduction. While I do not mean to imply that this settlement was solely the accomplishment of NC United Power, the pressure exerted on Bank of America and Wells Fargo/ Wachovia as well as the series of meetings the conducted with the AG's office and their representatives certainly played an important role in the process. Though a limited achievement, it is impossible to know how many of the millions of homeowners facing foreclosure were able to get some relief as a result of this settlement, the outline of which was first sketched in the conversations and meetings held at St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Charlotte, NC. But for the two women whose stories I recount below, the possibility of forgiveness, modification, and mutual provision discerned in this episode of binding and loosing, provided an alternative way to go forward, opening a new future. Once again, in doing so, it offered real hope to those stuck in despair and trapped in the destructive path of market forces.

Yvette Goggins, a resident of Greensboro, NC was on the verge of losing her home to foreclosure and repossession when Rev. Patrick Lattimore began working with her. Having worked for the better part of the 1990s as a mortgage broker until he had a "conversion," Lattimore then began to work with people in need. Hence, his pastor at the

time Tyrone Rigsbee and Goggins' father thought Lattimore would be the right person to help her in her struggle with Bank of America to keep her home. As a subprime client, Goggins was paying 11.9 percent annual interest on \$80,000 of remaining loan principle. That meant while prime interest rates were at record lows and the Federal Reserve was infusing banks with cash and setting the rate they could borrow at nearly nothing, Goggins was shelling out \$9,520 a year in interest payments. With a rate this high and the housing market in such trouble, Goggins was stuck with no real options. At the time he began working with her, Lattimore recounted, she was being "terrorized" by loan servicer phone calls, an onslaught of letters, and the immanent "threat of foreclosure." Consistent with the now widely known practice of dual tracking that was being employed by banks at the time, Lattimore found that while Bank of America introduced the idea of a modification for Goggins' mortgage, "they'd also break every rule under the sun to keep that from happening." What became clear to him, however, was that the cleverly devised "games" of the bank were meant to keep her on the verge of disaster in the hopes of getting as much out of her as possible. For instance, routinely the bank would place her on a ten-day deadline to receive her paperwork only to report back once she had sent it in that they did not received it but would extend the deadline slightly if she were to make another payment. As a result, Goggins was living in a constant state of "delay," "panic," and "fear," sitting on the brink of a personal disaster.

With Lattimore's help, and due to the growing publicity NC United Power had been able to generate of rampant problems in the proceedings as well as the prevalence of illegitimate paperwork resulting in wrongful foreclosures, Goggins was convinced to go

to her foreclosure hearing before the county Clerk of Court instead of simply allowing the bank to proceed without providing her input or story. Lattimore also helped Goggins compose a letter to bank executives, documenting the issues and disrespectful interactions she experienced with bank employees. “From that point on,” Lattimore recounted, “it got easier.” A contributing factor to this change of heart, Lattimore added, was the fact that, as a result of some of the pressure and work of NC United Power on banks and elected officials, some of their practices were being called into question. In the fall of 2010, as I mentioned in chapter three, Attorney General Roy Cooper asked Bank of America and others to halt foreclosures completely. Also, at this point Jeff Thigpen, Guilford County, NC’s register of deeds, was becoming suspicious of the foreclosure documents filed in his office. The pressure on the banks which would eventually lead them to willingly accept the \$25 billion settlement with National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG), finally, helped Goggins get a modification. She was able to negotiate an adjustment of this interest rate down to 8 percent, at which point she could make the payments. As Lattimore recounts, speaking of the newfound hope and the possibility of a new future Goggins had discovered as a result of this settlement, “she was glad... she thought I was an angel from heaven!”

Similarly, Jenny Barker and her husband Ron found themselves overwhelmed with debt and paralyzed by the threat of impending foreclosure throughout a four-year struggle with Bank of America. As I mentioned previously, her husband Ron and she had fallen into unemployment as a result of the economic downturn, but the real beginning of their economic crisis, as was the case with many other Americans, started when Jenny

was diagnosed with breast cancer in September of 2008. Compounded by job loss and a bank error that had miscalculated their escrow costs when they signed their loan, the Barkers had fallen behind on their readjusted mortgage payments by the end of the fall. Ron's hours were cut a month later due to the flailing economy and, though they continued to make the initially established monthly payment of \$1,787, they could not afford to cover the costs of the higher escrow which had bumped their monthly payment to \$2,400. As Barker recounted, like other families effected by the crisis, they were stuck "in a box" they could not escape from, desperately scrambling to try to find some way to keep up while making \$10.50/ hour instead of \$60,000/ year. After months of making up the difference on credit cards, the Barkers reached a point of crisis when Jenny was diagnosed again with breast cancer in September of 2009 and after several changes in his employment Ron was laid off in November. Undergoing her second surgery in December of 2009, Jenny could not return to the job she had begun to work until February of 2010, but by that time, she recalled, "[her employer] said that's great... there's no job for you." At that point she and her husband simply felt overwhelmed, helpless and hopeless as the bank was unwilling to acknowledge their particular situation. Recalling her frustration, exhaustion, and despair in battling with Bank of America, Jenny said, "They can put us as the puppet on the string and make us dance how they want us to dance..." with a "constant barrage of paperwork... a constant barrage of calls" and the threat of taking the house and the land.

The Barkers built their house in 2007 just before the housing collapse. Ron was making good money at the time, and the bank offered them one of the innovative

mortgage products that had them paying interest-only for five years while assuring them that housing prices were sure to continue to go up. “Like most Americans,” Jenny added, enthused by the new economy’s promise of continual growth and expansion, “we felt like by that time [the end of five years] I’d be working and his job would continue to increase...and that it would be okay to build the house.” More so than the house, what was truly important to the Barkers, Jenny noted, “was the land.” A gift from Ron’s parents, she added, the land “was his inheritance... and this was all he had.” Ultimately, it was this connection to the land that made them feel like they had to try to hang on and to fight the bank. They would spend the next three and a half years living in suspense, locked in a disorienting battle with Bank of America to keep their house.

Jenny got involved with NC United Power’s campaign through a class she was taking at Salem College, which put her in contact with CHANGE (Communities Helping All Neighbors Gain Empowerment), the IAF affiliate in Winston-Salem, NC. By attending a working session of CHANGE’s local metro caucus, Jenny learned how to get in contact with her local and state representatives to ask for their help in the dispute with Bank of America. As a result of NC United Power’s wider effort to engage representatives both at the local and national level, she was able to connect with Senator Kay Hagan’s office. Ultimately, Jenny recounted, “[That] was what really helped us... because had we not gotten that help we would have been like every other individual who is spinning her wheels for nothing.” Hagan’s office reached out on her behalf directly to the CEO’s office of Bank of America and persuaded them to take a special interest in the Barker’s case. Subsequently, Yvette Galloway McGill, an associate in the CEO’s office

was assigned to work on the Barker's case and though not initially responsive to the Barker's issues, Jenny relayed, as McGill became more aware of Jenny's personal story she began to help them more and more. A relationship began to develop. In the process two significant incidents slowly opened the door on a new future for the Barkers. First, in connection to the ongoing discussions between NAAG and the banks over the previous two years and because Senator Hagan's office put them in direct contact with the CEOs office, in March of 2012 the Barkers were able to get their \$32,000 second mortgage forgiven. However, they still were facing the likelihood of foreclosure due to their struggle to pay the initial mortgage and increased escrow.

The second event that occurred, however, truly changed their circumstances, unpredictably offering a new way forward. After having their request for modification denied three more times, even as they were working with McGill to process these requests, the Barkers had reached the end of their rope. Jenny recounted that they finally said, "That's it, we're tired of dealing with this," and began to reconcile themselves with leaving the home and the property. In a last ditch effort with an attorney they hired by drawing out of their retirement savings, Ron went to the foreclosure hearing on their home at the county Clerk of Court's office. Upon inquiring about their situation, the clerk gave them two months to figure something out. In the meantime, the Barker's received another denial from Bank of America in what appeared to be the end of the road on struggle to avoid foreclosure. But on Good Friday 2013, Jenny recounted, the impossible happened. On that day, as she was on her way to have lunch with her son, Jenny received an unexpected call from McGill. Tentatively, Jenny answered the phone, as she stated,

“in a sour mood.” To her surprise however, McGill said, “I was so excited... I couldn’t wait... I’m leaving for vacation but I just had to call and tell you. You’ve been approved for a loan modification!” “I just couldn’t believe it!,” Jenny said, “I sat in the car...just mouth open, dumfounded, in shock.” Their once \$2,400 a month payments had been reduced by the bank to \$1,550.

For both Yvette Goggins and the Barkers, as with active-duty and returning military personnel, a new future and the possibility of an alternative history were opened up by forgiveness and modification. A new way forward connected with a new process of reaching resolutions had emerged as a result of NC United Power’s campaign and the activity of congregation-based community organizing. What may seem like minor or negligible engagements had achieved real change for these families and individuals. In each instance some degree of the Jubilar forgiveness and mutual provision first articulated in the Theological Reflection on the Economy and preached and discussed in hundreds of churches around the state was experienced as a result of this work. A new beginning, a new way of going forward derived from the deliberations and conversations initiated at St. Martin’s and suggested in the proposal they reached was discovered. Throughout the process people like Yvette Goggins and Jenny Barker learned how to engage politically in a way that empowered them to work creatively to reconfigure the system from within. As Jenny Barker commented, somewhere along the way “I found my voice... [by] learning how to stand up for what [I] believe in...to bring people together and to motivate them.” Acting in collaboration with NC United Power, the campaign slowly began to infuse them with a will-of-hope corresponding to an apocalyptic politics



which pursued an alternate resolution while trusting that God would show up. By disrupting normal and unchallenged bank procedures with a process based upon the sacred mode of political judgment instituted in the practice of binding and loosing, new futures were opened, the power of the market and finance exposed and limited, and the seeming eternity of things as they are made contingent. Where the grand and universal history of capital offered no alternatives, the particular histories attended to within the relational and personalized politics of NC United Power discovered ways of breaking free from a general future determined by market forces and suggested new routes of moving ahead made possible by presenting new and different options. A mode of engagement correlated to a new conception of history and anticipating unforeseen possibilities was able to accomplish some small achievements that actually opened up a new future for these people.

### *The Church and the History of the Future*

I have shown that NC United Power's campaign against usury and foreclosure operated with a different sense of how to move ahead, which imagined and opened up new futures. As I want to make more evident now, they were able to do this by drawing off of the church's alternative conception of history as a way of challenging the narrative of history presented by capital that I described in the first section of this chapter. Because it conceives of history differently, the church was not bound to the logic of capital that maintains the way things are is the way they have and were meant to be. Similarly, the church offered a way of acting through the work of NC United Power that was not bound

to capital's program and its agenda. Instead, they were able to pursue a different future following a different path, one opened by a conception of history operating according to cross and resurrection rather than a financial rationality of investment and return. Accordingly, the church was able to embody the habits of listening, mutual respect, humility, generosity, and openness to learning and change needed to foster a radically democratic approach to addressing the issues that arose in the wake of the economic crisis in a way that was more vulnerable, more flexible, more attentive to the particular, and more receptive to the unforeseeable.<sup>68</sup> Reading history apocalyptically through Christ, the church was able to present a future through forgiveness and reconciliation rather than simply suggesting that people resign themselves to the inescapability of mounting debt and foreclosure. In short, because its experience of time and its conception of history are determined by the lordship of Christ whose grace and forgiveness continually offer it the possibility of making a new start, the church could act in patient listening, vulnerable dialogue, and persistent pressure to find alternative ways forward, expecting that God would show up. In this final section, therefore, I want to clarify this theo-political conception of history that completes the peculiar subjectivity engendered in the culture of the church and then how this orientation informed the work of NC United Power.

To challenge the end of history presented in and by capital, as I have indicated, there must be the possibility of moving forward in an alternative way by making a new start. As prescient a political thinker as Hannah Arendt recognized the necessity of

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<sup>68</sup> Dula and Sider, "Radical Democracy, Radical Ecclesiology," 488.

starting again as a means of sustaining politics and restoring it when the gears and mechanisms of the structure had become stuck or begun to decline. Key to renewing political life and making a new start is the capacity for action. Like Solon who in giving the Athenians a constitution rescued their society for the time being from degeneration or Pericles who turned Athens more toward democracy, convincing them of the greatness of their way of life, Arendt sees action as the initiation of a political process, setting a new social reality in motion.<sup>69</sup> The possibility for action, according to her, rests in the unique human capacity of “natality”.<sup>70</sup> Within the public space made possible by the achievement of freedom, an achievement that is largely lost to modern life immersed in work and fabrication, for Arendt, the unique action and speech of an individual can initiate new ways of living together in the same way the birth of a new child reconstitutes

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<sup>69</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 177.

<sup>70</sup> In her dissertation on Augustine’s concept of love, Arendt argues that, for Augustine, the human faculty of memory establishes its uniqueness both as a species when compared to other creatures and with respect to other humans as an individual. The source of the creature’s individuality and uniqueness, of course, is in God, who is the true principle and object of her memory because God is her Creator. Memory drives her to her origin. Hence, flipping Heidegger’s view in *Being and Time* on its head and redefining Augustine’s sense of origin within the register of immanence, she states, “the decisive fact determining man as a conscious, remembering being is birth or ‘natality,’ that is, the fact that we have entered the world through birth.” Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 51. Additionally, in part two of *The Life of the Mind* on “Willing,” she states, “[Augustine] then gives a very surprising answer to the question of why it was necessary to create Man, apart from and above all living things. In order, he says, that there may be novelty, a *beginning* must exist; ‘and this beginning never before existed,’ that is, not before Man’s creation. Hence, that such a beginning ‘might be, man was created before whom nobody was’ (*‘quod initium eo modo antea nunquam fuit. Hoc ergo ut esset, creates est homo, ante quem nullus fuit’*). And Augustine distinguishes this from the beginning of creation by using the word ‘initium’ for the creation of Man but ‘principium’ for the creation of the heaven and the earth. As for the living creatures, made before Man, they were created ‘in numbers,’ as species beings, unlike Man, who was created in the singular and continues to be ‘propagated from individuals.’” Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Inc., 1978), 108-9. As Mavis Louise Biss puts it, “Nativity is the universal condition of action that allows individuals to initiate new beginnings that interrupt the course of events.” Mavis Louise Biss, “Arendt and the Theological Significance of Natality,” *Philosophy Compass* 7, no. 11 (2012): 765.

a family.<sup>71</sup> My interest here is not to provide an exhaustive discussion of Arendt's enigmatic and controversial thought. Neither is it to engage in debates about the religious nature (or not) of Arendt's concepts. But as with Derrida's notion of *contretemps* in the prior chapter and connected to it, I will use Arendt's concept as an interpretive framework to help clarify the distinction between the conception of history offered by capital and that of the church which informed the work of NC United Power. The notion of natality in connection with forgiveness and promise, I suggest, help to define an alternative conception of history and, especially when considered within the theological register of the cross and resurrection, a corresponding apocalyptic politics.

Natality is a crucial condition for human existence, according to Arendt, if it is not to succumb to fatalism or the degeneration and decline of natural processes, especially, social, political, and economic processes. If humanity is not to be locked within a world determined by history or simply enslaved to nature, if the species is not to become prisoners of its own technologies, if it is not to become trapped by the devastation of warfare, fragmentation, and economic chaos or ecological ruin, then we must be able to break away from the trajectory of these forces. As Arendt puts it,

Our political life, moreover, despite its being the realm of action, also takes place in the midst of processes which we call historical and which tend to become as automatic as natural or cosmic processes, although they were started by men. The truth is that automatism is inherent in all processes, no matter what their origin may be—which is why no single act, no single event, can ever, once and for all, deliver and save a man, or a nation, or mankind. It is in the nature of automatic processes to which

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<sup>71</sup> As Biss reminds us, for Arendt, “genuine freedom is conditional upon the existence of a public space in which a plurality of individuals can act in concert with each other. In making freedom an achievement rather than a natural condition, Arendt highlights the fragility of humanity.” Biss, “Arendt and the Theological Significance of Natality,” 764.

man is subject, but within and against which he can assert himself through action, that they can only spell ruin to human life.<sup>72</sup>

Without surrendering to otherworldliness as a means of escape, Arendt, nonetheless, presents the possibility for history to be constantly renewed or redirected, arguing instead that humanity is not necessarily condemned to remain stuck within forms of life that have become deleterious. While it is true that humans frequently become captives of the world they have created, this need not augur the end of history and the end of politics. And no narrative of this end of history, for Arendt, is sufficient to foreclose the future or to exhaust the meaning of human existence.<sup>73</sup> Pointing to the contingent nature of human history and to the political realities of its organization, Arendt, following Marxist insights she inherited from Walter Benjamin and others, seeks to demystify the narrative of capital, exposing its own political interests in privileging itself as the end of history or the universal and eternal (natural) law whose goal of accumulation and growth is the ultimate meaning of human existence. There may be a proclivity in human processes toward automation and predictability, but humanity nevertheless possesses the capacity to alter them and to begin again even within a world of incessant change and movement.<sup>74</sup> In the

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<sup>72</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 167.

<sup>73</sup> She states, "Nothing in fact indicates more clearly the political nature of history—its being a story of action and deeds rather than trends and forces or ideas—than the introduction of an invisible actor behind the scenes whom we find in all philosophies of history, which for this reason alone can be recognized as political philosophies in disguise." Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 185. Arendt clearly has Hegel's notion of Spirit, Smith's notion of the hidden hand, Marx's notion of class consciousness and freedom, and I might add the spiritual narrative developed by Kojève and Fukuyama, in mind in this critique.

<sup>74</sup> Once again commenting on the unique faculty of natality, Arendt states, "Man is put into a world of change and movement as a new beginning because he knows that he has a beginning and will have an end; he even knows that his beginning is the beginning of his end—'our whole life is nothing but a race toward death.'" In this way, she continues, humanity bears the image of God in that "a being came into the world that, because it was a beginning running toward an end, could be endowed with the capacity of

concept of natality, Arendt proposes the potential for reconfiguring the world while avoiding the problems of otherworldliness or blind adherence to secular ideologies of progress.<sup>75</sup>

A new future is always possible. To this extent, Arendt is a political theorist of hope, and natality is the name she gives to this hope latent in her view of humanity.<sup>76</sup> Natality, even more, is the basis from which Arendt begins to sketch what might be referred to as a will-of-hope, exercised as individuals act in concert within a public realm of freedom. It is this possibility, this “miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin.”<sup>77</sup> As creatures capable of action, of making a new

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willing and nilling.” Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 109. Additionally, with respect to modern notions of freedom and spontaneity derived from Kant’s idealism, she notes, “...had Kant known of Augustine’s philosophy of natality he might have agreed that the freedom of a *relatively* absolute spontaneity is no more embarrassing to human reason than the fact that men are *born*-newcomers again and again in a world that preceded them in time. The freedom of spontaneity is part and parcel of the human condition. Its mental organ is the will” (110). The influence of Benjamin’s revolutionary messianism on Arendt is evident. Benjamin comments in his theses “On the Concept of History” that “The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption.” Therefore, he continues, “like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim. Such a claim cannot be settled cheaply. The historical materialist is aware of this.” Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938-1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. and ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006), 390. For his discussion of history being the narrative of victors, and the need for the historical materialist “to brush history against the grain,” see *Ibid.*, 391-2.

<sup>75</sup> Biss, “Arendt and the Theological Significance of Natality,” 770.

<sup>76</sup> Arendt’s messianism, as Frederick Dolan observes, allows her to take a different posture to the world, and especially the human world of politics. He states that for Arendt, “The redeemed, messianic world, accordingly, is in a sense already present, but in an *inconspicuous* manner as the potential to adopt a redeeming *perspective* on time. It is not a matter of *waiting* for redemption, as if time is an objective, autonomous structure that generates development independently of the agent and that gradually, inevitably devours itself. The point rather is to achieve the slight but significant change of perspective that plays down the fallen and plays up the redeemed.” Frederick M. Dolan, “An Ambiguous Citation in Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition*,” *The Journal of Politics* 66, no. 2 (May 2004): 608-9. Dolan follows closely on the heels of Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb in his discussion of the “messianic sensibility” of Arendt, whose book, *Regions of Sorrow: Anxiety and Messianism in Hannah Arendt and W.H. Auden* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), offers a more comprehensive engagement.

<sup>77</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 247.

start and of heading in a new direction, humans are able to willingly alter the course and reconfigure the order of things. This remarkable capacity is what fills politics with hope.

What sustains and facilitates Arendt's hopefulness, and the will-of-hope exercised in action springing from natality, are the practices of forgiveness and making promises. Forgiveness frees agents from the irreversibility of actions, allowing them to act again, to start anew, to make a new beginning. Without forgiveness natality would remain extremely limited, contained to one, initial action from which humans could not escape. Loosing us from the consequences of such actions, however, forgiveness opens the future for new and decisively political actions. At the same time, promises bind us to particular narratives and identities, granting a bit of certainty and orientation within a contingent world. Promises, therefore, also free agents from captivity to their own individual whims and equivocality, making way for a shared world as these individuals act in concert with one another. "Both faculties," Arendt writes, "therefore, depend on plurality, on the presence and acting of others, for no one can forgive himself and no one can feel bound by a promise made only to himself; forgiving and promising enacted in solitude or isolation remain without reality and can signify no more than a role played before one's self."<sup>78</sup> Loosing in forgiveness and binding in promise is what makes politics possible, and even more it is what privileges politics over history so as to open up new beginnings and new directions. These faculties facilitate natality and mark the way of hope in contrast to the automatism, isolation, and despair that characterize the predetermined future of capital's history.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 237.

While, like Derrida in the preceding chapter, Arendt is not interested in a theological rendering of these notions, I think the connections she draws between forgiveness, promise, natality, and the possibility of politics offers a helpful outline for understanding the apocalyptic politics of the church that, as I see it, maintains the intimate connection between radical ecclesiology of the rule of Christ and the radically democratic practice of congregation-based community organizing.<sup>79</sup> When reconsidered in light of God's invasion of the world and when understood not as a capacity intrinsic to humanity itself but made possible by the action of God in Christ, Arendt's ideas can help clarify how the political action of restoring relations and making a new start is opened through forgiveness and promise. A sense of natality derived from the cross and resurrection will recognize that there is the possibility of starting over because a history in which God is active can never be closed to the future. As Yoder puts it, "the present meaning of resurrection for ethics is that we are never boxed in."<sup>80</sup> The political message of the good news from which this people is constituted is a message of Jubilarly existence, one of forgiveness and making new beginnings. A different logic not reducible to cause and effect, not determined by the negation of war and work or the drive for dominion, and not moved by an engine of creative destruction and innovation, informs the conception of history at home in the church. Instead, correlated to a logic of cross and

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<sup>79</sup> It seems clear to me that Arendt's view of Christianity, born of her reading of Augustine, as ultimately otherworldly, prejudices her against thinking of these concepts within a theological register. See, Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 240-42, and *Love and Saint Augustine*, 40-44. Instead, she prefers to offer what she takes to be a secular, and therefore more worldly, and hence, political definition of these concepts. Additionally, I make intentional reference to the essay title of Dula and Sider, "Radical Democracy, Radical Ecclesiology" in this sentence.

<sup>80</sup> Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 319.



resurrection, it knows that what actually moves history is forgiveness and reconciliation.<sup>81</sup> In other words, forgiveness is the way of God in the world, and this apocalyptic conception of history engenders a corresponding politics as “the art of the impossible” that seeks such forgiveness and aims at reconciliation even when these seem out of touch with how things look on the surface.<sup>82</sup> Hence, an apocalyptic sense of natality characterizes the church’s political subjectivity, as it seeks through forgiveness to move with what it knows God is doing in history, infusing it with a will-of-hope in the practice of conflict resolution and making decisions.

Within the church an apocalyptic politics of natality, therefore, holds the future open because it preserves the community in an ongoing process of discernment, vulnerable receptivity, and humble dialogue as it seeks through binding and loosing to address issues and conflicts. As it practices this art the community realizes it is never stuck on a course from which it cannot escape or within conditions that determine exactly how it must proceed. Instead, it trusts that new revelations and leadings of the Spirit can open new ways forward, allowing for adjustments, challenges, and modifications. Through this constitutive practice, or what the theological ethicist James McClendon has called “a *politics* of forgiveness,” the equilibrium of a social body imbalanced by a wrong(s) can be uniquely reestablished, allowing the community to go on within the framework of a continual conversation. Through forgiveness and recommitment, he

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<sup>81</sup> Mavis Biss states that “although Arendt’s thought is emphatically anti-apocalyptic, her theory of action has the messianic structure of a dual temporality, in which there may be interruptions in time...without positing an end to time or history.” Biss, “Arendt and the Theological Significance of Natality,” 769. As will become clearer below, I see a strong similarity between Arendt’s view of action and time and Yoder’s apocalyptic sensibility.

<sup>82</sup> Toole, *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo*, 210-12.

states, “the closed circle is opened” because this process allows “the divine gift enabling disciple communities to cope with the looming power of their own practice of community, otherwise so oppressive, so centripetally destructive.”<sup>83</sup> By taking the time to engage conflicts personally and with a willingness to learn, to participate in patient dialogue and listening, and to cultivate an openness to others made possible by the norm of forgiveness, the community acting in the rule of Christ through binding and loosing performs a unique art of discernment that allows it to discover how to move forward in restorative ways that had been unknown. Functioning this way, moreover, the church can offer its peculiar ethics and politics as an alternative option to the automated and impersonal processes of worldly powers, making known and extending to society a different way to proceed in the face of conflict. Consequently, McClendon concludes, because they cultivate a disposition of vulnerability, listening, receptive generosity, and dialogue, “Those who have learned to deal with brothers and sisters within the community will not find it difficult to adapt both the forgiveness process and the sort of action that wipes clean the slate to new contexts outside the community.”<sup>84</sup> While this does not mean that sin is forgotten or that wrongs are ignored—as indeed they will be remembered within the precedence of the community for dealing with such situations, what it does mean is that sin and offense do not have to end in division or domination and that

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<sup>83</sup> James William McClendon, Jr., “The Practice of Community Formation,” in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre*, ed. Nancy Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Theissen Nation (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 98, 102. Similar to my own critique of MacIntyre, arguing that he takes insufficient account of the way power can direct and shape practice, in this essay McClendon notes that “[An] analysis of the powers is a necessary biblical corrective to Alasdair MacIntyre’s overly positive evaluation of practices” (94).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

further injustice does not have to be only way to proceed. Equipped with the divine gifts of these skills and oriented by a sense of history within which God is at work, the church can be a real source of hope as it extends this process and points the way to a new future by taking the time even in minor instances to find new beginnings.

Against the end of history narrative which serves to reify the hegemony of capital, an apocalyptic conception of history offers the imaginative possibility of a new political reality which is modeled in the church and springs from the independence of Christ. It is, through a peculiar hope, to be shaped in a unique style of life patterned on the particular person of Jesus, an alternative way of relating to one another and discerning the collective good. Inhabiting a new experience of time and formed as a new culture, the church as an apocalyptic people embodies a new hope—a new way of living in hope—within the politics of the world. “The hope of the Christian apocalypse,” Yoder asserts, “is not utopia, nor compensation for suffering, not trust in Darwinian or a humanistic law of progress, but reasonably founded extrapolation from the cross, the resurrection, and Pentecost.”<sup>85</sup> As he states elsewhere, it is the “fulfillment of a social hope... [that] involves a different way of living.”<sup>86</sup> The embodiment of this new humanity is indelibly tied to a particular orientation within history and a unique way of being temporal engendered by God’s invasion of the world in Jesus Christ. Because, as Yoder recognizes, “*Hope* and *incarnation* are not two separate themes,” the person of Jesus reveals how to embody “concretions of hope.”<sup>87</sup> Christian hope, while apocalyptic, is not

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<sup>85</sup> Yoder, *War of the Lamb*, 63.

<sup>86</sup> Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 246.

<sup>87</sup> Yoder, *War of the Lamb*, 61.

otherworldly. Neither does it look to escape time and history. Instead, is immediately political even as it operates with political dispositions that have a certain independence from the political strategies of the world's powers to accomplish real achievements. For those oriented by the new age of the reign of God initiated in Jesus, Yoder asserts, "Time matters. The historical process matters."<sup>88</sup> From an apocalyptic perspective, God's work is not outside human history. Neither is God the opposite of time and history. But time and human history, politics and social relations, are part of the real substance of the lordship of Christ and the reign of God.

For the church, the future is made possible not by the struggle for lordship or the innovative drive for accumulation, but by Christ's lordship and God's restorative work actualized in forgiveness and reconciliation. For Yoder this means that as it binds and

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 250. The proximity between Yoder on this point and Liberation Theology deserves more exploration, but suffice it to say for now that, like Gustavo Gutiérrez, Yoder's theology begins and remains focused on the action of God in human history. Refusing models of secular development, i.e., capital, and Christian models that stress the otherworldly nature of the church, i.e., escapisms of all varieties, Gutiérrez and Yoder agree that God is doing something in history and that the church has a role to play in what God is doing. The difference between them lies in the place of emphasis: for Yoder it is on the apocalyptic presence of the church as a real eschatological community existing in hope whereas for Gutiérrez the eschatological hope remains focused on a future, just society. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); and Brad J. Kallenberg's comparison of Yoder and Gutiérrez with respect to Alasdair MacIntyre in "Positioning MacIntyre within Christian Ethics," in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition*, 74-80. Yoder remains close to Barth in stressing the historical nature of God's work in the Incarnation as both the "aim of creation" and the substance of all history (Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 59-60. At the same time, because it knows the truth of history in Jesus Christ, the church is "entrusted" with the "task" of attesting to this truth within the world, making known this "new thing." Ibid., IV/3.2, 709. It does so as it embodies the history of reconciliation in its midst as the repetition of the occurrence of Christ. Ibid., IV/1, 157f. Additionally, I believe this is what Yoder's perspective can be most decisively distinguished from John Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy. To the extent that within Milbank's "metanarrative realism" his ontology tends to overdetermine his ecclesiology, he has no place for conflict within the church. Accordingly, for him, conflict can only occur outside the church or between the church and the world, the latter of which is to be won by the church through rhetorical force. The implication of his view, as I understand it, is that importance of history within the church is downplayed in in direct proportion to the amount of emphasis placed on a highly professionalized (i.e., hierarchical) and mysterious practice of the Eucharist. See Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 384ff.

looses, “the place of the church in the history of the universe is the place where Christ’s lordship is operative.”<sup>89</sup> Knowing that Christ’s lordship is the key to the meaning of history and that his lordship has been revealed in servanthood, so the political subjects of the believing community perceive that they “[move] history by [their] servanthood,” and that the rules of the game are not fixed.<sup>90</sup> In opposition to the notion that the dynamism of creative destruction, self-interested desire, entrepreneurialism, or market forces create and drive the development of history, what Yoder thinks the church as a social body offers is an entirely different way of conceiving how history moves. As he puts it, “The fact that God extends Christ’s reign in a hidden way through the powers and in a visible way through the servant church is the reason for history. This is why time goes on.”<sup>91</sup> Oriented apocalyptically, the church inhabits a larger history unbound by the limitations and meaningfulness claimed by any worldly empire and, as a result, it can act out of the independence this orientation provides to resist and hold accountable state and economic apparatuses that claim blind allegiance or attempt to naturalize their operations. It therefore knows that there is a future, a new age, more attuned to the will of God and more characterized by his justice and grace not because of the inevitability of human progress or development, but because reconciling the world to himself is exactly what God has and is doing in Jesus Christ (II Cor. 5: 19). Such a perspective allows it to go about the business of engaging the specific needs of others and addressing issues in a

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<sup>89</sup> Yoder, *Preface to Theology*, 248.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

personal and particular way even when this activity seems insignificant or small, knowing in hope that it is just such activity that really moves history.

As it interfaces with the world, therefore, the sacred structuring processes of the church can be the basis for beginning on a new, alternative future for history. Offering its own process of deliberation and making decisions in witness and service to the world, furthermore, it can effect in others something like “a qualitative transformation of the perspective in which one thinks about the possible,” empowering them with a sense of hope “that the universe is open toward the future.”<sup>92</sup> Through extension and extrapolation of this process, the church can discover and offer the world new possibilities that free it from the fate of the general trajectory of the past or impersonal and automated forces. The path of forgiveness and mutual provision, of reconciliation and conflict resolution opened up by an apocalyptic conception of time and history can provide a way out of the sclerosis of a history that seems to have reached its end. A different direction for society than the one set by creative destruction aimed toward unlimited accumulation and growth is possible when the church makes use of its own political processes to address the issues and conflicts that emerge. As a force of resistance and transformation within the structures of the market and the empire of global capitalism, the church’s apocalyptic politics can function as a resource for societal change through the missionary vehicle of congregation-based community organizing. Engaging in such activity, the church can serve to lead the world toward its ultimate future and end in justice in a way that has real

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<sup>92</sup> Yoder, *War of the Lamb*, 62.

impact and creates waves throughout the culture. In the case of NC United Power's campaign, this is exactly what took place.

As can be seen from the stories I have recounted, an alternative conception of history and an apocalyptic politics grounded in the church's sacred process of binding and loosing functioned to provide hope and to offer the possibility of a new future both for individuals trapped on the destructive side of capital and for banks devoted solely to the goal of profitability. For those active in the work of NC United Power, the time given to them by God to listen, deliberate, engage, and discover alternative resolutions offered a way of resisting and transforming a process determined by the rhythm of market forces. As a result, they were able to cultivate a will-of-hope that they could offer to others through the campaign by empowering them to pursue the possibility of a new start in forgiveness and mutual provision. While acting in a visible manner to pursue a new future, the will-of-hope they displayed also continued to trust that God was operating in hidden ways through the power of the banks, and despite their opposition, to offer a new way forward. For active military families struggling to pay higher interest rates or facing the prospect of foreclosure, this meant interest rate caps on mortgages, principal reduction, and relief from foreclosure and rate increases for twelve months after their return. It also meant restitution for more than 700 of them who had suffered illegal foreclosure. For Yvette Goggins and the Barkers, it meant loan modification, principal and second mortgage forgiveness, lowered interest rates, and more manageable monthly payments, making it possible for them to keep their homes. As each of them testified, the work of NC United Power offered a way of hope in the midst of despair, a way to go

forward in what looked like an impossible and dire situation. As these stories illustrate, through the vehicle of community organizing the church was able to resist and challenge the structures and power of the market, of finance and corporate profit, opening their operations with the possibility of new resolutions and new futures more resonant with the justice of God.

Through the work of NC United Power, the sense that there was no way around the outcomes of market correction or adjustment was demystified and relativized by an alternative approach to the future. Looking to God and to an alternative process of discernment, it offered the new option of forgiveness and provision. In the face of extremely powerful market forces and corporate and financial interests, those active in the campaign could continue to be hopeful and to work for transformation, resting in the knowledge and the conviction that “The ultimate meaning of history is to be found in the work of the church.”<sup>93</sup> Such a historical orientation and political posture was possible because the churches participating in NC United Power believed that, in Yoder’s words, “The power of God works in ways that we can understand and help with, even though we cannot manage it. We can still trust the Lord that if we do it in this way, it will work. The power of love to change hearts is something that we can count on.”<sup>94</sup> Acting in faithfulness through the practice of its sacred processes, the church can anticipate that the extension and extrapolation of these processes as political tactics in something like congregation-based community organizing will be effective. And yet, it will also have a

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<sup>93</sup> Yoder, *Royal Priesthood*, 151.

<sup>94</sup> Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, And Revolution*, 238.



more patient and longer vision of effectiveness allowing it to persist in faithfulness even when these tactics do not appear to be immediately successful. Knowing ultimately that forgiveness and reconciliation cooperate “with the grain of the universe,” the church by pursuing the rule of Christ in ever-wider circles can engage the world through CBCOs, trusting in Christ’s lordship over history in following a theologically apocalyptic pragmatics to work for change.<sup>95</sup> It is this peculiar hopeful rationality that is embodied in the process of binding and loosing and extended into the world in the activity of community organizing, forming a will-of-hope to discover, expect, and open a new future of history.

### *Conclusion*

In a culture dominated by global capital, a universal conception of history correlated to the homogenization of time and defined by the incessant drive toward accumulation and growth captivates the social and cultural imagination with a sense that the market is eternal and that the order it establishes is the way things ought to be. Capital, from this perspective, is thought to be the end point of history, the fullest and most meaningful expression of human civilization and development. Within such an end-times mentality, many people find themselves perilously adrift on the currents of market forces, trapped under debt, and increasingly cornered by repetitive crises that leave them dispossessed. To contest such currents, however, would seem to be a futile attempt to challenge the eternal laws of the cosmos or to struggle against the inevitable tide of

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<sup>95</sup> Yoder, *The War of the Lamb*, 62, 64.

history. To resist, and maybe the first and most critical activity of resistance in such a situation, therefore, requires the cultivation of a new conception of history corresponding to an experience of the integrity of time beyond that presented by the empire of global capital.

As a social, historical community oriented by a larger history in which God is active and directed by a politics of forgiveness resonant with the meaning of history made known in the person of Jesus, the church can envision and pursue an alternative way forward to the one posed by the market or the mechanisms of capital. While I sought to offer some examples of how a new future was opened up as a result of the extension of the church's sense of history through the work of community organizing, in conclusion I also want to acknowledge that one of the biggest limitations of the campaign on usury and foreclosure was the degree to which member churches and individuals were unwilling to participate in the deliberative process of binding and loosing. As indicated by the response of many churches, several of which were predominantly white but some of which were not, relinquishing authority and political judgment to the market and its professionals was a main source of frustration for organizers and a significant restriction on the campaign. More conversations need to be convened and conducted around issues of the economy. More discussions on usury, the role of the market, and the injustices of capitalism are desperately needed in the church. Refusing to engage around these issues leaves the church atrophied and crippled and it leaves the world without a witness, stuck in viscous cycles with no real way to move forward.

Writing on the “price of the neglect” of the process of binding and loosing in the church, Yoder offers four detrimental consequences that have disabled the church and its missionary role in the world. First he notes, the church is not faithful, because its political judgment is not guided by the Spirit. Second, he asserts, the church is not forgiven and lacks direction. Third, it has succumbed to the notion that its directionlessness and unresolved conflicts are a sign of maturity. Finally, he notes, the collective result is that the church is not missionary, because it fails to practice the very forgiveness that is its gospel message.<sup>96</sup> By failing to enact and rely on the process of binding and loosing, the result is that the church, and thereby society and the world at large, is not forgiven and is not led toward its ultimate destiny. Instead, it is caught with no sense of justice and no alternative to the unjust processes of global capital and high finance. As congregations abdicate the process of conflict resolution, of offering forgiveness and seeking resolution, they slide further into the same trap of debt, destruction, and zero-sum game competition that dominates a society and world directed to the ends of accumulation and exchange. Floundering at the end of history, if the church does not learn to recover this central practice and, in doing so, to rediscover the unique power that constitutes its own life, it, like the rest of culture, seems relegated to a future determined by the blind operations of markets and profit. And yet the resources to work for change and to open history remain at hand where two or three begin to gather in his name to listen to wrongs and address issues in a mode of discernment moved by forgiveness and aimed at reconciliation.

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<sup>96</sup> John Howard Yoder, “Practicing the Rule of Christ,” in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition*, 153-4.

NC United Power's work, like the church's conception of history upon which it relies, continues. At present, an initiative working with state legislators to institute a bill (House Bill 437) that will create a Veterans fund by offering individuals the opportunity to donate five dollars of their state tax return is underway. The fund created by these donations, under the structure of the bill, would be allocated by county so as to allow the local veterans' associations to offer support and assistance on a personal level in a way that is more intimately familiar with individual veterans and their needs. It is the hope of NC United Power that this fund will help to curb the issues of homelessness, poverty, unemployment, and debt that plague the veteran population by opening a new and creative means of provision. Additionally, NC United Power leaders are actively working with Linda Simmons Senior Vice President at Bank of America and Program Management Executive for its National Mortgage Outreach through their relationship with Andrew Plepler to identify potential recipients for homes the bank is looking to give back to the community. Finally, NC United Power's member organizations continue to host workshops on foreclosure prevention for those struggling to make their payments and to keep their homes. They also are continuing to pursue legal action against the banks for faulty foreclosure paperwork identified by their constituent organizations through audits of the files held by Clerk of Court in each county. The hope is that, at minimum, more accountability by requiring updated, hard copies of any transfer of ownership on a mortgage or loan be required, and even a fee for the filing of new paperwork be paid by the bank as a way of raising funds for local government services. Some of these actions will be more successful than others, but the work continues guided by a sense that the

history of the future is open to the graciousness and justice of God if only people will seek it. It is a search that has and must continue to originate in the church, providing the base of faithfulness that makes congregation-based community organizing so powerfully effective.

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In his discussion of congregation-based community organizing Ed Chambers notes that “IAF collectives exist to act for justice with power by using sound political judgment.”<sup>97</sup> What I have sought to add to his observation in this dissertation is that in the case of NC United Power the nature of that justice and the mode of political judgment resonant with it were rooted in the structuring practices of the church. Working in concert with the process of binding and loosing, NC United Power’s campaign sought a way out of the economic crisis of 2008 through forgiveness and mutual provision that resisted and challenged the course being pursued by officials and executives operating in accord with the rule of capital. Engaging conflict, beginning within its own congregations, and then seeking positive resolutions through deliberation and dialogue as illustrated in the series of meetings conducted at St. Martin’s, NC United Power acted within the power of the rule of Christ to propose new ways forward where no alternative political options seemed to be available. To this extent I have agreed with Richard Wood’s assessment that “the real source of faith-based organizing’s success lies in the backstage processes that generate its moral-political culture,” even as I have more theologically specified the key

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<sup>97</sup> Chambers, *Roots for Radicals*, 65.

process to be binding and loosing.<sup>98</sup> As I have shown, through one to one meetings, prayer, discernment, engaging conflict, evaluation, ongoing dialogue and deliberation, and continual training, the basic elements of this process were all extended and extrapolated in the work of NC United Power to enact an alternative political process. Like Wood, I have insisted that Christianity is central to the operation of congregation-based organizing and that it offers unique resources for overcoming the “anemia” of American politics at present.<sup>99</sup> The possibility for doing this, I have asserted, is due to the unique practice of time and the alternative conception of history consonant with the culture of the church’s structuring practices and corresponding to its apocalyptic orientation.

In my own assessment, to the extent that NC United Power was unable to credential its own activity with respect to the process of the rule of Christ and to the extent that some of its member churches and individuals were unwilling to participate in just such a process of binding and loosing did the campaign encounter internal limits. Indeed, as I showed, some of these limits proved to be quite debilitating, as was the case with many white churches reluctant to discuss economics. But it is also the mode of this process that gives NC United Power, and IAF work more generally, its non-Constantinian style, distinguishing it from the Religious Right, party politics, or identity activism. Knowing in Christ the real meaning of history and the way of life that moves accordingly, the church can lead the world out of impasses and cul-de-sacs it otherwise

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<sup>98</sup> Wood, *Faith in Action*, 164.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

would not know how to escape or move beyond. It does so through the social enactment of forgiveness and recommitment that makes politics possible, by allowing for new beginnings. By recognizing and cultivating what Mark Warren describes as an “interpenetration of religion and politics,” NC United Power was able to make real inroads and generate some change in the practices and processes associated with how the finance industry was attempting to deal with the economic crisis.<sup>100</sup>

Whereas Warren, however, goes on to suggest that campaigns such as the one I have recounted offer “a public role for the church through IAF political organizing,” my argument has suggested the reverse of this statement.<sup>101</sup> Instead, I have proposed that because the church is public in its origin, its social practices and processes can provide the basis for the work of IAF organizing. Because faith is not simply a hidden, inward, and individual experience or a mystical, secret, and unobservable activity, but a public and accessible social process, politics is not some alien sphere within which the church is necessarily disoriented, off-balance, or lacking the real tools to participate. By denying the barrier between faith and politics without seeking to take over, moreover, churches active in NC United Power were able to engage on issues affecting their community and the larger society. To this extent, I have sought to make more explicit Romand Coles’ sense that Christianity deeply impacts the way radical democracy is understood and practiced.<sup>102</sup> Through congregation-based community organizing, the church is able to extend and extrapolate its own politics as a missionary activity into the world, and the

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<sup>100</sup> Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 59.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>102</sup> Coles and Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 11.

more congregations realize this the stronger I believe these community organizations could become and the more invigorated the church could become. As I have indicated, through the vehicle of CBCOs churches can act within the new age of God's reign in a missionary endeavor that is both faithful and effective at finding new options to make real change and to actualize, within a world seemingly captive to the end of global capital, a history of the future.



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